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THE STATE OF CRITICISM*

The Effects of Critical Theories on Practical Criticism, Cultural Journalism, and Reviewing

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: The subject of this morning's discussion is the effects of critical theories on practical criticism, cultural journalism, and reviewing. The speakers will be Morris Dickstein, whose latest work is *Gates of Eden,* a study of the culture and politics of the sixties, Eugene Goodheart, chairman of the English department at Boston University, and Rosalind Krauss, who teaches at Hunter.

Morris Dickstein

In an 1891 essay called, simply, "Criticism," Henry James, who had suffered greatly from the obtuseness of reviewers, posed a dilemma which bulks ever larger as the territory of criticism expands: "The bewildered spirit may ask itself, without speedy answer, what is the function in the life of man of such a periodicity of platitude and irrelevance? Such a spirit will wonder how the life of man survives it, and above all, what is much more important, how literature resists it. . . ." For all his exasperation James was no enemy of criticism, not the artist determined to keep the mysteries of his trade intuitive, unspoken. The prefaces he later wrote to the New York Edition of his novels aimed to provide formal ground for the criticism of prose fiction. But James could not anticipate the forest of signs and symbols that would grow from his formalist acorn, nor could he imagine that technical sophistication would one day pose as great a threat to literature as the philistine platitudes of periodical reviewers. Once long

*Some of the papers and discussion at the Conference on the State of Criticism (held at Boston University on September 14 and 15, 1979) were printed in the 1980 #3 issue of *Partisan Review.*

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ago, while I was looking for a thesis topic, a gust of inspiration picked me up and whispered in my ear "Conrad." I went to the Cambridge University library to case the terrain, but soon gave way to an almost physical nausea at the sheer quantity of what had already been done, enough to weigh down and bury all inspiration forever.

Problems of quantity are quickly translated into problems of quality. Our understanding of both James and Conrad has benefited greatly from what Roger Gard describes as "the absolutely unprecedented increase in this century of 'professional' students of literature." But as the amateur Gentleman of Letters, who remains anonymous to protect his social status, has given way to the academic busywork of practical criticism, our increase of knowledge threatens us with a bureaucratization of the imaginative, while artists, out of an instinct for self-preservation, stop paying attention. It's easy to see why this quantitative explosion of criticism doesn't contribute to the march of mind. Scholastic work generally remains within the parameters already established in the "field"; the existing literature, with its prevailing categories and methodologies, the whole discipline, with its hierarchical channels of certification and advancement, are so much dead weight on the shoulders of the living. New views are encouraged to differ, but only minutely, from the academic consensus; when such views gain acceptance, they too become part of the conservatizing inertia of that body of received opinion.

In the secondary world of literary criticism, where everything is commentary, new views are not even required, only new "readings," only texts that can be "read" and re-"read" without going too obviously dead on you. Was it for this that my mother and father saved their pennies to send me to college? The specter that has been haunting practical criticism for decades is the plague of numbers, the proliferation of mediocrity. Of what earthly use, outside the classroom, the certification rituals of the academy, is yet another reading of a poem or play that has been continually understood and intuitively enjoyed for at least three centuries, or even three decades? The New Criticism provided excellent tools for pedagogy, but it also bound criticism over to the pedagogic spirit, while severing it from the free play of mind that gives intellectual life its excitement and its value. This is what drew many of us to literature and criticism in college. The study of literature demanded a sheer love of language and storytelling for their own sake, yes, but the great writers also had something to say; the cognitive mysteries and affective intensities of the work of art lay before the young would-be critic like a land of dreams.

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It doesn't take many months of graduate school to disabuse the novice of these prospective ecstasies. The routines of professionalism and apprenticeship, combined with the pseudoscientific methods of positivist scholarship, quickly make an interest in ideas a hindrance, if not an irrelevance, and turn affective intensities into a distracting luxury. A personal stake in books must give way to a personal stake in one's career, and to a casual facility masquerading as authority. Today the graduate study of English is closing down shop, a casualty of the job market, but the best that could be said about it fifteen years ago, when it was thriving, was that a really deep love of literature *might* survive it, though it could not expect much encouragement. When the word literature is used in graduate school, it usually refers not to the work of art but to the body of writing that has been secreted around it, like the Biblical glosses which, sentence by sentence, make up the edifice of the true church.

I needn't go into the ways that received opinion is sanctified and institutionalized. In any case, by the early sixties traditional scholarship was on the defensive; the spirit of practical criticism, with its emphasis on the text itself, had made serious inroads even into such bastions as the scholarly journals and the major graduate departments. Yale, where I was a graduate student, had long been the redoubt of a muted and academicized version of the New Criticism, which combined a focus on literature itself with a proper respect for what everyone else had said about it. But the New Criticism was already a tired movement, a toothless lion, well past old insurgencies. It had made its peace with the old scholarship, whose occasional value it acknowledged. Interpretation and critical thinking had by then acquired some status and respect in graduate study. But the New Criticism itself was not interested in ideas, which it considered a little extrinsic to the literary work, and it showed relatively little interest in theory, except as an afterthought to justify its procedures of close reading.

There is a body of New Critical theory on such matters as organic form, the intentional fallacy, image and metaphor, and so on, but it followed on the heels of the movement's practical work. The New Criticism spread its influence more through textbooks like *Understanding Poetry* than through much later theoretical polemics like William Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon.* In Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* the theoretical chapters seem very much like a postscript to the exegesis of individual poems, and by the time of René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature* the battle was essentially

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over: the time for handbooks and codification had arrived. And as an academic procedure, churning out new "readings," the New Criticism could be as spiritually deadening as the old scholarship.

For all its formal sophistication, for all its attention to the stresses and internal contradictions of the literary work, the New Criticism, by objectifying and hypostatizing the text, never really broke with the positivism of the philologists and the source-and-analogue hunters. For the scholars the text was the sum of its traceable influences. René Wellek recalled taking a seminar on Goethe's *Faust* which began so far back it never reached Goethe. "All we ever established about *Faust*," he said, "was that it existed." For the New Critics, those inheritors and exegetes of modernism, the text's existence was of more complex concern than its ancestry. The New Critics heard the battle cry of modernism, *Make It New*, and behaved as if this rupture had actually been achieved, or desired, by every significant work, past and present. Just as they tried to sever the practice of criticism from theory and ideas, they failed to see that in a way the scholars were right: the text was a living tissue of its manifold contexts. Everything that went into it—the mind that composed it, the language that articulated it, the literature that preceded it, the social moment that conditioned it, the generations that had put their mark on it, the minds that received it—was flickering, prismatic, and unstable. For all their lip service to a Coleridgean idea of organic form, the practice of the New Critics usually betrayed a surprisingly mechanical notion of form. Paradox and ambiguity were there *in the object*, and they served moreover not as elements of internal drama, diversity, and self-contradiction but as elements of a higher unity, a conservative principle of order.

What finally signed the death warrant for the New Criticism was not its conceptual weaknesses but its practical triumphs. Like all successful movements, the New Criticism died when it was universally assimilated. Its techniques of close reading, its vision of formal coherence, its attention to patterns of metaphor and narrative personae, were integrated into the useful equipment of every teacher and critic of literature, and even affected the readers who had gone to school with them, some of whom became editors, journalists, book reviewers, and even authors. Few have ever suggested returning to the days of genteel impressionism or dry factual scholarship. But by the late fifties and sixties, many began to feel bored and constrained by the anatomical approach of New Critical reading. They were eager to see the literary work reconnected to the wider world of history and theory, politics and psychology, from which the New Critics had amputated it. They

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envied the broader horizons and grander ambitions of European criticism. Writers like Auerbach, Spitzer, Lukacs, Poulet, and Bachelard were expected to become guides in the struggle of American critics to pass beyond formalism, but they were far too idiosyncratic to offer any ready new method, and they made fools of less learned and nimble men who tried to imitate them too directly. It was only the arrival of structuralism in the late sixties and seventies that seemed to provide a way out of the formalist impasse with new critical techniques.* For all their formidable difficulty the work of Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Barthes, and Derrida collectively breached the resistance to theory endemic among English and American critics. Sympathetic expositors grew up at key American universities, who themselves began to provide a body of theory which rivaled the work of the Europeans in its daunting complexity and its elusiveness of style.

Marxism, Freudianism, structural linguistics, deconstructionism—American critics have thrown themselves into difficult and often contradictory conceptual systems with a reckless zeal as strong as their previous resistance. Yet the critical utopia that once seemed promised by these theoretical breakthroughs has yet to materialize. Americans have learned to handle big European ideas, but they have yet to translate them into effective critical practices. The test of a critic comes not in his ideas about art, and certainly not in his ideas about criticism, but in the depth and intimacy of his encounter with the work itself—not the work in isolation, but the work in its abundance of reference, richness of texture, complexity of thought and feeling. If the New Critics inhibited themselves by objectifying the text and putting it under glass, the deconstructive critics display their ingenuity by evaporating the text into an infinite variety of readings and misreadings. We grant that no two readers read the same book. But by scanting the degree to which their readings may overlap, the deconstructive critics undermine the communal basis of practical criticism, which is grounded in the possibility of common perception and mutual assent. The provisional (rather than definitive) character of any reading does not therefore condemn us to an anarchy of subjective isolation. Cut off from a text that he can manipulate at will, isolated from an audience whose agreement he deliberately eschews, the deconstructive critic creates an almost impenetrable barrier—his style—which repels the

*In this paper the term "structuralism" is used broadly to refer to both structuralist criticism and certain key post-structuralist developments. The term "deconstructionism" refers here exclusively to this later phase.

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uninitiated and becomes the self-fulfilling prophecy of his own apartness.

There is much to be said against the Arnoldian public style which has dominated English and American criticism, especially for the air of objective authority it arrogates to itself. But the plain style is at least a communal style, not a specialist's jargon, and its transparency assumes that what matters about art is its relation to life. Deconstruction, on the other hand, especially among the imitators of Derrida, gives rise to an intensely literary style, an artifact style, that mimics the self-referential involutions of art's relation to itself. Sentences take a long, sinuous course before looping back upon themselves, donnish puns cascade over one another, hyphens separate syllables to highlight dubious etymologies. Having decided that art is not about life but only about itself, the deconstructionist then insists that criticism can't really be about art but only about *itself*. Life is a construct, a series of fictions; art is a discourse which helps create those fictions; and criticism is a competing discourse without genuine access to either art or "life"—an illusion created by language.

Writing these sentences I feel myself falling into the very jargon I have criticized. Words take on a life of their own, and in the process lose their referential power and their ability to communicate something precise and concrete. In *Practical Criticism* I.A. Richards quotes Blake, who says that "Virtue resides only in minute particulars," which could stand as a justification for the whole enterprise of practical criticism. To avoid dissolving into generalities, and to keep myself from foreclosing the possibility that structuralist theory, for all its disbelief in the idea of the individual author, will someday prove itself in the criticism of actual works, I'd like to take a closer look at Richards's book, which was a key influence on the New Criticism, and compare it to structuralism's most ambitious attempt at practical criticism, Roland Barthes's *S/Z*. Before doing that I ought to explain at last what I mean by practical criticism, and sketch in some of the background of its development.

The student of criticism written before the twentieth century can't help but notice that he almost never encounters detailed analysis of individual works or passages from them. Before the beginning of the nineteenth century, even essays devoted to individual authors are a rarity. Unlike the history of art, the history of criticism is progressive and cumulative. Criticism builds on past work as art need not. But until the early nineteenth century the history of criticism is really a history of aesthetics, not of critical practice. Though there is no reason

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to think that men of taste and perception in past ages read more superficially than we do, the comments they left us often seem distant and external.

Occasionally, a work of aesthetic theory, such as G.E. Lessing's *Laocoön*, would shade off into close textual commentary of a surprisingly modern kind. There was also the precedent of a long tradition of Biblical hermeneutics, as well as early legal commentaries such as Blackstone. But by and large practical criticism developed in response to the immediate exigencies of expanding middle-class cultural activity. During the Romantic period reviewing became the mediating force between an increasingly difficult literature and an increasingly diverse audience; and a reviewer was prompted to confront the individual work as the aesthetician had not.

Yet the great English reviews which were founded then, such as the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, were far from ideally receptive to the best poetry of the age, and their critical work has come down to us largely as a sour footnote to the history of English Romanticism. Before we conclude that the discovery of close reading coincided with the loss of our ability to read, or at least to read deeply and feelingly, we ought to remind ourselves of James's response to his reviewers' tribute of incomprehension and disapproval: "a periodicity of platitude and irrelevance." It would be hard to find a better phrase to describe the work of those who populate I.A. Richards's modern *Dunciad*, oddly misnamed *Practical Criticism*. For several years in the late 1920s, Richards distributed groups of anonymous short poems to his undergraduate classes at Cambridge, giving them a week to compose written comments. Selections from these comments or "protocols" make up the body of *Practical Criticism*. Although Richards introduces his material modestly, as an experimental survey and "documentation," and his own comments on the protocols and poems are spare and laconic, others have followed his hints and asides to read recklessly large implications into his evidence. According to Stanley Edgar Hyman, who is no enemy of hyperbole, "what the protocols reveal, by and large, is probably the most shocking picture, exhaustively documented, of the general reading of poetry ever presented."

Published exactly fifty years ago, *Practical Criticism* has always been considered one of the landmarks of modern criticism, but, like many so-called classics, it's more respected than read. After all, what shocked Hyman in 1948 could hardly surprise anyone who corrects undergraduate papers today. On the contrary, the contemporary reader is likely to be impressed by the technical sophistication and polemical

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eloquence with which the protocol writers pursue lines of argument wholly irrelevant to any kind of fair-minded criticism. The main disability of Richards's readers is that they come to a poem with fixed notions of what a poem ought to be, instead of attending to what is actually there. Richards is very amusing on this tendency of his readers to write substitute poems out of their own experience, which displace the poem on the page. Richards demonstrates how "critical preconceptions" and "technical presuppositions" can blind readers to the whole point of a work, especially if it is original in form and intention. "The blunder in all cases," says Richards, "is the attempt to assign marks *independently* to details. . . . It is the blunder of attempting to say how the poet shall work without regard for what he is doing."

This emphasis on internal form and on the totality of the individual work was Richards's chief legacy to the New Critics. Richards has a great feeling for how poems are put together. His notion, developed in other books, of poetic statement as "pseudo-statement," emotive and provisional in character rather than cognitive and discursive, provided later critics with a rationale for objectifying individual works and isolating them from larger cultural contexts. Yet Richards himself, like the other great practical critic who emerged from the Cambridge English school in the 1920s, F.R. Leavis, almost never explicates. Richards's work, for all the uses to which it has been put, offers a good deal which undercuts formalism and anticipates later developments, including structuralism. With his interest in psychology, linguistics, semantics, Basic English, literary theory, and oriental thought. Richards is very much the nineteenth century professor of Things-in-General. Every page in *Practical Criticism* that tells us that works have a unity of form also tells us that they have a diversity of meaning, that people will read them in different ways, in different moods, using different codes and assumptions.

This is especially true when they receive works without the provenance and cultural authority of the individual author. Richards's experiment in anonymous reading foreshadows the structuralist interest in a science of literature, as well as the dream of a literature without authors, cut loose from the mystifying bourgeois idealization of the individual artist, bathed in the semiological glow of a staggering variety of semantic codes and potential meanings. Though New Critical exegetes like Empson and Cleanth Brooks took from Richards a sense of the inherent ambiguity of all texts, they saw these contradictions as features of the object rather than aspects of its subjective assimilation. Richards anticipates the recent interest in literature from

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the point of view of the reader, which the New Critics ruled out under the heading of the Affective Fallacy. For Richards, on the other hand, a science of literature is a subdivision of a science of life, a psychology of behavior and emotion. He sees emotion as the fundamental element in literary response and, unlike the New Critics, makes short shrift of the critical charge of "sentimentality" when it is simply a cover for disagreement or simple contempt. His reaction to the protocols, which is usually so oblique and understated—we never learn what Richards thinks of most of the poems he presents to his students—rises to a pitch almost of indignation when they use their critical sophistication to rend the emotional fabric of Lawrence's "Piano." With his keen interest in emotion and his sense that critical judgments are judgments about life as well as art, Richards is far from sharing the anti-Romantic bias which Eliot and Hulme passed on to the New Critics.

I can't refrain from pointing out one other feature which gives *Practical Criticism* its contemporary feeling and keeps it a living work: its form. Cast as a report on a quasi-scientific experiment, "the record of a piece of field work in comparative ideology," Richards takes pains to avoid the belletristic pontifications of a conventional man of letters. When Richards castigates "the attempt to assign marks *independently* to details that can only be judged fairly with reference to the whole final result to which they contribute," he is describing not only the hapless efforts to his untutored students but the whole line of attack of periodical criticism and book reviewing from the Romantic period to his own day, and well beyond. The fissure opened up by the new modernist sensibility, into which those very student "collaborators" who participated in Richards's experiment would later stumble and fall, is closely related to the growing gap in England between the conservative taste of the periodical reviewers and the more advanced literary thinking which was growing up in the universities. It's in the context of this split between the middle-brow metropolitan culture of book clubs and consumer guidance and the advanced literary culture of Cambridge that we must see Richards's refusal of the essayistic mode, his unwillingness even to make explicit judgments of the works he presents for study.

Practical Criticism is not an essay but a palimpsest—a dramatic interchange in which Richards's own voice is marked by restraint, understatement, irony; it contrasts sharply with the more assertive critical voices of the protocols, whose very diversity demonstrates the manifold range of reading and meaning. There are serious weaknesses in the analytic part of the book, where Richards is sometimes tempted

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to assume the role of the village explainer, but the documentation section, the interplay of different poetic texts, the voices of the protocol writers, and Richards's own tone of subdued irony and donnish whimsy make the book a uniquely entertaining work of criticism, as bold in form as it is unusual in content.

It would be tempting to round off our survey of practical criticism by saying that Roland Barthes's book *S/Z* bears the same relation to structuralism that Richards's book does to the New Criticism. Both are idiosyncratic works, in surprising ways more like each other than like the work produced by critics who share their own approach. Of course there's a long and dreary tradition of *explication de texte* in the French school system, from which Barthes takes care to distinguish himself, but the advanced part of French intellectual life is highly theoretical, grounded in philosophical training, with no equivalent Anglo-American empirical tradition to provide ballast. Deconstructionists have been much less eager to apply themselves to literary texts than to spin out pure theory or comb earlier thinkers like Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, or Bataille for anticipations of their own views. In *S/Z*, even more than in his books on Racine and Michelet, Barthes sets out not only to confront a literary work, but to confront one as alien to his own modernism and structuralism as can be imagined.

The quasi-scientific, quasi-dramatic form of Richards's book finds its unexpected complement in Barthes's amazing effort. The New Critics rarely ventured beyond the confines of the short lyric poem and had little luck with narrative fiction, but Barthes's line-by-line commentary on *Sarrasine*, a little-known novella by Balzac, makes it one of the longest secular texts ever analyzed so exhaustively. And since the book quotes the entire text of the novella, dividing it into 561 separate units or *lexia*, there's a constant interplay between the voice of the narration and the voices of the critic. Like Richards, Barthes dedicates the book to his student collaborators, but their voices are never heard in *S/Z*: their views have been assimilated by Barthes, who intercedes with comments and miniature essays literally between the lines of Balzac's story.

As an experiment in reading as disintegration and deconstruction, *S/Z* is unique. Barthes follows the linear sequence of *Sarrasine* from the first sentence to the last, but rarely has a critic intervened in a literary work, *interrupted* it, so aggressively, so possessively. Barthes's stated aim is to avoid doing a conventional "reading" of Balzac's story, one that would reductively recompose it into the prose and the argument of the critic. His purpose is to preserve and extract the multiplicity of the text's meanings, the range of codes which make up a grid of interlock-

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ing significations. Like Richards he eschews belletristic continuity, preferring the appearance of scientific analysis, and even constructs his title out of a symbolic paradigm rather than a piece of prose.

But out of this very attempt to write an *open* book, rather than a closed and seamless critical discourse, Barthes decomposes the Balzac story more thoroughly than any conventional exegete. A "reading" at least is a point of view, which we approach as argument, aware of its partiality; but Barthes's interlinear commentary, like a page of the *Interpreter's Bible*, looks both exhaustive and official, for all its insistence on the text's inexhaustibility. Barthes even expresses annoyance that his readers are likely to want to read the whole Balzac story first, before turning to what he calls his "manhandling" of it. "Those who like a good story may certainly turn to the end of the book and read the tutor text first; it is given as an appendix in its purity and continuity, as it came from the printer, in short, as we habitually read it." That is to say, Barthes's book, like some specially formed creatures in nature, must be entered from the rear. But when we turn to the appendix, already ashamed of our perverse reading habits, our unseemly appetite for the original, far from finding the text "in its purity and continuity," we find it interrupted by 561 numerical superscriptions, denoting Barthes's lexical divisions (as in some kind of unreadably overannotated scholarly edition). The critic's blows have landed even in the despised appendix; even the "original" text has been typographically deconstructed.

We need to inquire into the origin of the deconstructive critic's rage at what Barthes calls the classical or the "readerly" text—the realistic narrative accessible to naive consumption—which shows itself both in his critical procedure and the never explained fury of his slashing style. As a literary journalist Barthes had come to prominence as a modernist, an exponent of Brecht, Robbe-Grillet, and the *nouveau roman*. Barthes had ingeniously developed the critique of illusionism and verisimilitude of both of these writers. But in *S/Z* he sets himself the task of commenting on a traditional narrative, while still holding to the view that its "realism" is a mystification and a deception. The alien character of the text and its remoteness from what he officially likes—yet also his fascination with its themes of castration and sexual ambiguity—bring out the best and worst in Barthes as a critic. Barthes's very distance from realistic storytelling, his profound suspicion of its unreflective enchantments, enables him to describe the sheer mechanics of its construction more intricately than anyone since Henry James. If James aimed to make readers more conscious and respectful of the *art* of fiction, Barthes is eager to alert them to its mesh of

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appealing deceptions, its false continuity and lifelikeness, "the 'glue' of the readerly," which attaches "narrated events together with a kind of logical 'paste.'" If an extremely observant, articulate, and highly cerebral Martian had arrived on Earth and immediately been handed a novel to read, this is the account of it he might have produced. As always, Barthes transposes the concrete into the abstract, and falls into overanalysis and wild hyperbole. Yet somehow, quite wonderfully, Barthes has managed to create the frame of mind of a man reading a novel for the first time, amazed at the concatenation of "events" into the simulation of a story, of "life." In his very anger at this *trompe-l'oeil* Barthes has succeeded in accounting for the almost indescribable feeling of wonder that lies at the root of our affinity for stories. But in doing this he also becomes the viewer who stares too long and too closely at a painting, until it becomes just dots and patches of pigment. Finally, he projects on the narrative the very suspicion with which he himself greets and examines it.

The fear of "the scandal of some illogicality, some disturbance of 'common sense,'" that Barthes attributes to the classical narrative, may be news to those whose literary taste is guided by the Prix Goncourt, but most of us have long understood that realism is a set of literary conventions rather than a direct reflection of reality, that life rarely duplicates the pattern of a well-made plot, that dialogue is a stylized suggestion of the real, not naturalistic transcription, and that realism, like all other conventions of discourse, has social and ideological presuppositions that should be of interest to the critic. But Barthes attacks realism only in its most naive sense—of art as a photographic duplication of reality—rather than the more subtle concept of social representation developed by Lukacs, Auerbach, and others. Barthes's assault on realism, carried out within the textual terrain of one of its greatest practitioners, is an extension of his demystification of the mythologies of popular culture, where he shows that what looks naive and natural is really a manipulative system of signs. Performed virtually without reference to Balzac's other work, it is also an attack on the very idea of the Author, "that somewhat decrepit deity of the old criticism," who "can or could some day become a text like any other: he has only to avoid making his person the subject, the impulse, the origin, the authority, the Father." But by denying the personal element in both narrative and authorship, by concentrating so much on the mechanics of verisimilitude, Barthes virtually jettisons the human element in literature, which all but the Martian can recognize and respond to. Far from passing beyond formalism, he simply dilates its concern with technique into more grand and subjective terms.

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This self-conscious emphasis on mechanics, on formal engineering at the expense of theme and emotion, is one of the weaknesses which practical criticism and structuralism share. Barthes might retort (with Foucault) that this notion of the human is itself ideological, but this would not diminish his own disability in the face of what really moves people in literature. Practical criticism is both the shame and the glory of criticism, its nadir and its summit, shameful because it is merely practical and obsessed with technique, glorious when it really gets close to the work of art in a life-giving interchange of both judgment and interpretation, will and understanding. Here Barthes shows his superiority to most structuralist criticism. We all know that literature is written in language, but the structuralist is obsessed with language, and tends to give literature a wholly self-referential character. In deconstructing the role of the author, the stance of the critic, and all naive assumptions about content and representation, structuralism represents another turn of the wheel of modernist self-consciousness, which arrived late in France but arrived with a paralyzing vengeance. And the critic's own involutions of style are a signal of his paralysis. Barthes, on the other hand, by grappling with the monster Balzac at his most lurid and exotic, undergoes the kind of unsettling confrontation which is the glory of practical criticism. In spite of himself he makes a neglected text vibrate with meaning, and develops a "reading" which can vivify and illuminate it even for someone who doesn't share his theoretical interests.

We take very little away from most deconstructive reading, except for the spectacle of a mind dancing on the head of a pin—if that kind of prose can be called dancing. Because many brilliant critics have been attracted to structuralism, their work often tells us more about literature peripherally than their theory allows. Eliot once said that "the only method is to be very intelligent," and structuralists are frequently more intelligent than their method. A recent elegant example is Jacques Derrida's essay on Nietzsche, "Spurs," which pretends to be about style but also manages to build up a fascinating pattern, almost entirely by quotation, of Nietzsche's notions about women. Gradually, however, the seductive distance and alluring inaccessibility of Woman modulates into an assertion of the distance and inaccessibility of Truth, and Nietzsche's texts on women are appropriated to confirm Derrida's own view that "there is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche's text." To demonstrate this point that "truth is plural," Derrida settles on a few strange words written in quotation marks in one of Nietzsche's unpublished manuscripts: "I have forgotten my umbrella." Derrida observes that this text may be

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trivial or highly significant. It may mean everything or nothing. As a text it is merely a "trace," a detached remnant of something which may be irrecoverable. From this exquisite miniaturization, however, Derrida leaps without warning to the largest generality: the possibility that "the totality of Nietzsche's text, in some monstrous way, might well be of the type 'I have forgotten my umbrella,'" for this illusory "totality" is itself no more than a larger trace or remnant of what may also be irrecoverable. And the same may be true of Derrida's own "cryptic and parodic" text, which he suggests may be no more than a joke, a parody of his own ideas, and so on.

Derrida's aim, which he achieves beautifully, is to open up a vertigo of interpretation which forswears interpretation—by excess of interpretation to prove its very futility—to place a time bomb in the analytical baggage of all practical criticism. It's a brilliant performance, a feat of prestidigitation, but to agree with him we must abandon the plain evidence that a good deal more can be gleaned from Nietzsche's books, and even from Derrida's, than from the phrase "I have forgotten my umbrella" (though, as Derrida would say, the latter can be more important when it starts to rain). What really damages deconstructionist criticism is not the questions it raises about the status of texts and the possibilities of interpretation but rather its remoteness from texts, its use of them as interchangeable occasions for a theoretical trajectory which always returns to the same points of origin, the same indeterminacy and happy multiplicity. For Nietzsche and his umbrella we could substitute Rousseau and his ribbon, or any other text, and the point would be the same. What wouldn't change is the use of texts as opportunities for self-display, the abdication of responsibility which Steven Marcus aptly describes as a "cheerful nihilism." For the New Critical text as object we have simply exchanged the deconstructionist critic as subject. Skeptical of interpretation, the critic remains faithful to the sound of his voice, the invitation texts offer to his own resourceful cleverness.

Eugene Goodheart

Morris Dickstein's paper expresses the ambivalence toward the new New Criticism, which has characterized the spirit of the conference. Virtually everyone has spoken of the temptations of structuralist and deconstructionist understandings of literature. At the

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same time there is an impulse to resist the temptation caused by the suspicion that the price of these understandings may involve the loss of older and more authentic views of literature. The ambivalence corresponds to a double movement in recent criticism, which simultaneously affirms and denies what it offers. Morris Dickstein formulates this double movement, when he says: "Derrida's aim . . . is to open up a vertigo of interpretation which forswears interpretation." At the end of his essay Dickstein comes close to rejection: that is to a skepticism about the programmatic skepticism of the Newest Criticism. My own view, I think, is very much in the spirit of this ambivalence.

Until recently, structuralist and post-structuralist theorizing had little if any effect upon practical criticism. To expect that it would seemed almost philistine—like asking how a particular speculation in Marxist theory could help make the revolution and bring about socialism. And in a sense the resistance to praxis is justified. Theoretical speculation always requires a certain insulation from practical concerns if it is to have the freedom to unfold its logic. If one always has an eye on the particular literary text while theorizing, theoretical thought will tend to become timid and compromised.

The pioneering phase has passed. Structuralism and post-structuralism (whatever is encompassed by those terms) have produced their practical criticism or what passes for it. *Presence/absence, trace, erasure,* the *space of writing* (Derrida's terms) need not be the occasion for theoretical speculation. They are now unproblematically accepted by accomplished critics and writers of dissertations as a way of reading works of literature. Yet I would argue that for structuralists and post-structuralists practical criticism is an alien function.

Practical criticism was an invention of the New Critics. Unlike the criticism of the past, it meant a close reading of individual literary works, principally lyric poems, more problematically stories and novels. "Close reading" is a somewhat opaque phrase: it can mean the interpretation of patterns of meaning, or the characterization of patterns of imagery or plotting, or an analysis of formal devices of poems or tales. It implicitly, if not explicitly, involves evaluation. Since the New Criticism valorized complexity, paradox, and irony, their presence or absence in a work becomes an occasion for judgment.

Practical criticism assumes what structuralist and deconstructionist readings do not assume: the integrity and objectivity of the literary text. The conception of the text as radically indeterminate allows the text to disappear as a discrete object and to reappear as a projection of the mind of the reader. Having vaporized the intrinsic structure or structures of the text, the critic has nothing left to interpret or to

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evaluate. He is now free to engage in an activity resembling, but quite different from, practical criticism: the inventing or reinventing of the text. This idea of the reinvention of the text has its anticipators in the New Criticism. R.P. Blackmur spoke of a good reading of a poem as the making of another poem and Kenneth Burke's way of talking about literature implied indeterminacy in its erosion of the boundaries between texts. But neither critic gives us in performance anything like the self-reflexivity of Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, still the "classic" expression (to use a term repugnant to Barthes) of the new New Criticism.

My account of the indeterminancy of the text may suggest that the text offers no resistance—which, of course, is not the case. Part of the pleasure or excitement of Barthes's reading is in the overcoming or shattering of the resistance of the text. The critic explodes or liberates the text, the agents of repression being the novelist's discursiveness and the narrative binding of the tale: its plot. In *S/Z* Roland Barthes is the kind of critic against whom the mere writer doesn't have a chance. The political and military imagery is not fortuitous. Barthes and some of his associates in the *Tel quel* group have displaced an anarchic radical political energy found in the streets of Paris to the activity of criticism. Without the trace of a political motive, the American version of this critical attitude seems like an exercise in narcissism. Narcissism: the term has been transvalued by Barthes and others, who welcome and celebrate it. But the narcissism is of a particularly disciplined kind. For all of the deconstructive fireworks of *S/Z*, it is clear that Barthes is not free to say anything he pleases about the text: he is constrained by his five codes, and those codes are not eccentric personal inventions. Barthes works within the discipline of Saussurian linguistics. I am not judging the scientific adequacy of Barthesian semiology. I simply want to qualify the hostile view of Barthes and others as exponents of unbridled, irresponsible critical subjectivity. In *S/Z* Barthes has found a way of reconciling science and narcissism.

Criticism, as Barthes practices it, suggests Derrida's erased or cancelled sign: a simultaneous assertion and denial of the reality of the text. Balzac's text is fully present in Barthes's presentation, but so defamiliarized (I am assuming our initial encounter with it) that we hardly recognize it—as if the "practical critic" were, as Morris Dickstein strikingly suggests, a highly intelligent Martian. According to Barthes, criticism is sanctioned neither by its empirical fidelity to the text ("its task is not to discover truths") nor by the authority of its motive or purpose ("the language each critic chooses to speak does not come down to him from Heaven"), but by its own internal validity, for

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which there are only two conditions: first, the internal consistency of the discourse, and second, the saturation of criticism with the object of which it speaks.

What is unmistakably clear is that this disciplined operation occurs at the expense of author and text. It also occurs at the expense of practical criticism. In an essay called "The Death of the Author," Barthes remarks, "historically the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic. . . . Criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author." What remains in the wake of the demolition of author and critic is the reader.

The tendency of readerly criticism is democratic in the sense that it equalizes (at the very least) the author and the reader. More accurately, the author becomes irrelevant as readers appropriate texts for their purposes. One virtue of this democratic view is paradoxically that it permits powerful readers, those with creative instincts and superior intelligence, to assert their will against works of imagination that are not of the first rank (for example, Balzac's *Sarrasine*). It may be liberating to be able to explode the visible structure of a work, when that structure seems to repress or limit the possibility of certain interesting meanings.

Practical criticism has been a casualty of current theory to the extent that it has been influenced by it. Jonathan Culler, for instance, speaks of the insidious legacy of interpretation left by the New Criticism and urges the profession to go beyond interpretation. With the denigration of interpretation and evaluation what is left is a formalistic attention to devices and conventions, the investigation of "the conditions of meaning" and the study of literature as an institution. By "the conditions of meaning" most structuralists and post-structuralists mean the study of the linguistic or semiotic structures of texts. The effect of such study is to erase the individual differences among works of literature. It seems to me a perversity of the theoretical mind in literary study to see differences among works as uninteresting and to prefer general truths.

Reviewers, who have generally responded in personal terms to books, continue and should continue largely unaffected by current theory. The New Criticism may have made them sensitive to ambiguity and irony, but nothing in recent theorizing—with the possible exception of its new liberationist ethic—has much to teach reviewers.

As for cultural journalism, a prime example of what is possible is, of course, Barthes's *Mythologies*. His demystifications of the myths of bourgeois mass culture from a semiological point of view show what

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the theoretical presuppositions of current theory can accomplish in the practice of a powerful "critic." Barthes's performance is a richer version of the kind of criticism of mass culture accomplished by writers like Harold Rosenberg, Dwight Macdonald and Leslie Fiedler (before his fall). The American critics in the fifties formulated a sociology of cultural hierarchy (high, middle, and low-brow culture), which enabled them to attack middle-brow culture. But the sociology was theoretically simple and vulnerable to the populist assault of the sixties. Barthes's examination of bourgeois myths is vulnerable too, as I have tried to argue in an essay on *Mythologies*, but his extremely resourceful attention to the *sign-system* of bourgeois myths is, I think, a contribution to the understanding of our cultural life.

Rosalind Krauss

The title of this morning's session—"The Effects of Critical Theories on Practical Criticism, Cultural Journalism, and Reviewing"—would suggest that what is at issue is the dissemination, or integration, of certain theoretical perspectives into an apparatus of critical practice that reaches well beyond the graduate departments of English or comparative literature at Harvard, Yale, Cornell and Johns Hopkins. The subject would seem to be the effect of theory on what Mr. Dickstein describes as "the mediating force between an increasingly difficult literature and an increasingly diverse audience," a mediating force that would be represented in this country by a long list of magazines and journals, headed, undoubtedly, by *The New York Review of Books*. Now this is a subject on which Mr. Dickstein's paper—obsessed as it is by what he sees as the deepening technocratization of graduate studies—does not touch. And if by this omission he means to imply that he thinks that advanced critical theory has had *no* effect whatever on that wider critical apparatus, then Mr. Dickstein and I are in complete agreement.

But the question would seem to be—Mr. Dickstein's laments aside—*why* has there been no such effect? And in order to broach that subject I would like to recall briefly two lectures I witnessed by two of the technocrats in Mr. Dickstein's account: Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Derrida's lecture was the presentation of part of an essay called "Restitutions of the Truth *en pointure*," which in examining the claims Heidegger makes in "The Origin of the Work of Art,"

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focused on a painting by Van Gogh commonly thought to be the depiction of a pair of shoes. In that lecture, Derrida placed somewhat special emphasis on the role of a voice that kept interrupting the flow of his own more formal discourse as it spun out the terms of philosophical debate. This voice, which Derrida enacted in a slight falsetto, was, he explained, that of a woman, who kept breaking into the measured order of the exposition with questions that were slightly hysterical, very exasperated, and above all *short*. "What pair?" she kept insisting; and "Who said they were a *pair* of shoes?" Now this voice, which he cast as a woman's, was of course Derrida's own; and it functioned to telegraph in a charged and somewhat disguised way the central argument which for other reasons must proceed at a more professorial pace. But aside from its rather terroristic reductiveness, this voice functioned to open and theatricalize the space of Derrida's writing, alerting us to the dramatic interplay of levels and styles and speakers that had formerly been the prerogative of literature but not of critical or philosophical discourse.

The fact of this arrogation of certain terms and ruses of literature leads me to the other lecture I have in mind, the one by Roland Barthes entitled "Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure" where, by analogizing his own career to that of Proust's, Barthes more explicitly pointed to an intention to blur the distinction between literature and criticism. Indeed much of Barthes's most recent work—I am thinking of *The Pleasure of the Text*, *A Lover's Discourse*, and *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*—simply cannot be called criticism, but it cannot, for that matter, be called not-criticism either. Rather criticism finds itself caught in a dramatic web of many voices, citations, asides, divigations. And what is created, as in the case in much of Derrida, is a kind of paraliterature. Since Barthes's and Derrida's projects are extremely different, it is perhaps only in this matter of inaugurating a paraliterary genre that their work can be juxtaposed. The paraliterary space is the space of debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity, coherence, or resolution that we think of as constituting the work of literature. For towards that notion of the literary work, both Barthes and Derrida have a deep enmity. So what is left is drama without the Play, voices without the Author, and criticism without the Argument. And it is no wonder that this country's critical establishment—outside the university, that is—remains unaffected by this work, simply cannot use it. Because the paraliterary cannot be a model for either the judgment of or the systematic unpacking of the meanings of a work of art, which criticism's task is thought to be.

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Now the creation of the paraliterary in the more recent work of these men is of course the result of theory—their own theories in operation, so to speak. And these theories run exactly counter to the notion that there is a work, X, behind which there stand a group of meanings, A, B, or C, to which the hermeneutic task of the critic gives us access by unpacking, revealing, breaking through, peeling back the literal surface of the work. But by saying that there is not, *behind* the literal surface, a set of meanings to which it points, or models to which it refers, a set of originary terms onto which it opens and from which it derives its own authenticity, by denying these, this theory is not prolonging the life of formalism and saying what Mr. Dickstein claims "we all know"—that writing is about writing. For in that formula a different object is substituted for the term "about" and so instead of a work's being "about" the July Monarchy or death and money, it is seen to be "about" its own strategies of construction, its own operations of language, its own revelation of convention, its own surface. And in this formulation it is the Author or Literature rather than the World or Truth that is the source of its authenticity.

Now it is in Mr. Dickstein's view of this theory—that it is a jazzed up, technocratized version of formalism, that its message is that writing is about writing, and that in a work like *S/Z* Barthes's "purpose is to preserve and extract the multiplicity of the text's meanings"—that we come not only to the point where there is no agreement whatever between us, but also to the second possible reason why this theory has left the wider critical establishment of this country in such virginal condition. For I would say that whereas that establishment—and I am speaking of a practice that is not university-connected—has not been largely ignorant of the work of Barthes or Derrida or Lacan, it has misconceived or misconstrued it. For, to use the example that Mr. Dickstein has provided us, *S/Z* is precisely not the preservation and extraction of "the multiplicity of the text's meanings." Nor is it what the jacket copywriter for the American edition claims: the semantic dissection of a Balzac novella, "in order to uncover layers of unsuspected meanings and connotations." For both these notions—"extraction" and "dissection"—presuppose an activity that is not Barthes's own, just as they arise from a view of the literary object that is precisely the one that Barthes wishes not so much to attack as to dispel. For "extract" and "dissect" assume a certain relation between denotation and connotation as they function within the literary text. Those verbs assume, that is, the primacy of the denotative, the literal utterance, beyond which lies the rich vein of connotation or association or meaning. Everything in our common sense conspires to tell us that this

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should be so. But Barthes, for whom common sense is the enemy, due to its unshakeable habit of fashioning everything on the model of nature, is trying to demonstrate the opposite, trying to prove that denotation is the effect of connotation, the last block to be put in place. *S/Z* is a demonstration of the way that systems of connotations, stereotypes, clichés, gnomic utterances, in short the always already-known, already-experienced, already-given-within-a-culture concatenate to produce a text. And further, he is claiming, it is not only this connotational system that writes the text, but it is, literally, what we read, when we read the literary work. Nothing is buried here that has to be "extracted"; it is all part of the surface of the text. In identifying connotational systems as codes, Barthes writes, "To depict is to unroll the carpet of the codes, to refer not from a language to a referent, but from one code to another. Thus, realism consists not in copying the real but in copying a (depicted) copy of the real. . . . This is why realism cannot be designated a 'copier' but rather a 'pasticheur' (through secondary mimesis, it copies what is already a copy)."

The painstaking, almost hallucinatory slowness with which Barthes proceeds through the text of *Sarrasine* provides an extraordinary demonstration of this chattering of voices which is that of the codes at work. And if Barthes has a purpose, it is to isolate these codes by applying a kind of spotlight to each instance of them, to expose them "as so many fragments of something that has always been already read, seen, done, experienced." It is also to make them heard as voices "whose origin," he says, "is lost in the vast perspective of the already-written" and whose interweaving acts to "de-originate the utterance." It is as impossible to reconcile this project of Barthes's with formalism as it is to revive within it the heartbeat of humanism. To take the demonstration of the de-originated utterance seriously would obviously put a large segment of the critical establishment out of business; it is thus no wonder that post-structuralist theory should have had so little effect in that quarter.

But as Mr. Dickstein points out, there is another place where this work has met with a rather different reception, and that is in the graduate schools where students, whatever their other concerns might be, are interested in reading. And these students, having experienced the collapse of a modernist literature, have turned to the literary product of post-modernism—one of the most powerful examples of which is the paraliterary work produced by Barthes and Derrida, among others. If one of the tenets of modernist literature had been to create a work that would force reflection on the conditions of its own construction, that would insist on reading as a much more consciously

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critical act, then it is not surprising that the medium of a *post*-modernist literature should be the critical text wrought into a paraliterary form. And what is clear is that Barthes and Derrida are the *writers*, not the critics, that students now read.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I want to point out that structuralism has become the main theme of this conference. Lines seem to be drawn between those who favor structuralism or are sympathetic to it and those who are opposed to it or are unsympathetic to it. It seems to me that Rosalind Krauss, who has been forthright in her espousal of structuralism, is really more consistent than people who are trying to sit on the fence. As I read her, she is saying that if structuralism is not only a new but a valid and useful approach to literature and to the other arts and disciplines of thought, then it should be invading what she calls the critical establishment. That is, that those of us who write ordinary reviews and ordinary literary essays are being impoverished. I think we should address this issue.

PETER BROOKS: I think it's clear that the organs of the intellectual mass media—*The New York Review of Books* and others—have systematically refused to review structuralist material. I think it is imperatively important that we discuss this question.

ROSALIND KRAUSS: I absolutely agree with what Peter says. I think there is not a conscious conspiracy, but an unconscious conspiracy to keep material which the editors of, for instance, *The New York Review of Books* refer to as "froggy thinking," out and I think to denigrate it.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Is there other evidence of this so-called conspiracy?

ROSALIND KRAUSS: I think that in a certain way the setup of this particular symposium is evidence of it. I was particularly concerned about Friday's sessions where there seemed to be a sort of easy acceptance of the idea that this material is written in jargon. It is *not* written in jargon. I'm referring now to the specialized language Morris Dickstein was talking about.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: Well, what is jargon but a specialized language?

ROSALIND KRAUSS: I think there is a difference. For instance, one uses the terms *denotation* and *connotation* and when I started using those when I was standing up there I heard William start rattling the change in his pocket because those terms make him very nervous. But they have specific meanings and I don't think that they are jargon.

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WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I thought you were a structuralist, not a psychoanalyst.

ROSALIND KRAUSS: It doesn't seem to me that words like *denotation* and *connotation* are unapproachably difficult terms. What I am saying is that I think Peter is speaking for a certain group of us here who are a little bit disturbed about what we see as this meeting's continuation of a kind of general American hostility in journals and reviews against what you insist on calling structuralism—and it isn't. It's something that's absolutely happened after structuralism.

EUGENE GOODHEART: I didn't use the word jargon, so I'm not going to defend my position in those terms. I do think it is a possible criticism of this conference that it was insufficiently dialectical in the sense that the structuralist position has not been adequately and fully represented by structuralists who are able to argue the position fully. The leading paper on structuralism was presented by Denis Donoghue, who presented a very lucid, very gifted exposition, but he was essentially critical of structuralism and it might have been better to have had it presented by a structuralist. Anyway, Barthes and Derrida do get public attention. I have been arguing against something else, against the idea that there is something in the method of structuralism or post-structuralism that can be communicated to the act of reviewing itself.

EDITH KURZWEIL: I am hearing this, of course, from my own sociological perspective. And I find it interesting that structuralist writers cannot get reviewed. I assume the reference is to structuralism in general, that it is being discarded, dismissed as jargon. But the same thing holds true for people who are writing on structuralism and who are critical of structuralism. Articles or books written against it are automatically being sent to structuralists who are on the defensive. They devastate anyone who is even mildly critical. I think this is to some extent symptomatic of the ideology of structuralism itself, of the underpinnings that don't seem to come out. My own sense is that there is a certain politics or nonpolitics in structuralism which is beneath the surface and which we haven't really talked about, except to some extent when Roger Shattuck touched on different aspects of morality and so on. I think that we should talk about these underlying components rather than the method of structuralism.

ELLEN LAMBERT: It seems to me that the questions of what reception theoretical work would get or of censorship are different from the question of how this particular theory encounters the literary work itself and what application it has. Can structuralism engage a work,

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review it in the sort of way that one might expect to see a book reviewed? Does structuralism have that kind of application to the ordinary type of book review?

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I think you're right: the question of whether *The New York Review of Books* wants to print favorable reviews of books of structuralism or not is different from the question that was raised by several speakers: why the ordinary—let's use the word ordinary—critic and reviewer has not been influenced by structuralism and doesn't reflect its influence in his own writing. You can't blame the problems of structuralism on *The New York Review of Books.* This is paranoia.

ROSALIND KRAUSS: William, the thing is that we've said over and over and over again, whether we've deplored it as some people have in the various sessions or welcomed it as others have, that post-structuralism is not interested in the two tasks that reviewers still seem to think are their tasks, namely the evaluation of a work of art and its interpretation. It's just not interested in that, doesn't want to do that; that's not its job.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: That's a good reason why it's had no effect! That's just something in the nature of it—that's not censorship either.

ROSALIND KRAUSS: There are two separate issues. I certainly agree with Peter that there has been an interesting exclusion of the various processes of understanding structuralism in the wider critical press. That's entirely a side issue from the other issue of why it hasn't had any effect on the actual practice of X, Y, and Z critic. What I'm saying is that if X, Y, and Z critic took seriously the kind of disintegration of the organic wholeness of the work, the thing that one would evaluate and interpret, they would just have to close up their tents and go away. I recently wrote an essay on the subject of grids. That is, mainly paintings but also sculptures that are based on the grid. Now obviously from Mondrian to, say, Agnes Martin or Kenneth Noland, the grid has been an incredibly persistent and ubiquitous visual form in twentieth century art. The reviewer, I mean that mentality whose job is to judge, evaluate, interpret the work of art, would obviously address this material in a very different way from the way that I chose to do. I assume that my choice was informed by structuralism, because the set of questions that I asked had nothing to do with whether a work was good or bad or what the work meant but rather to say that it seemed to me that the grid structure was something that had to do with repression, that one of the things that one experiences in the work of artists who take up the form of the grid, and Mondrian seems to me to be a perfect example

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of this, is that that very form precludes development. So what you have is something in which the same thing is being repeated over and over and over again and that then leads to a set of questions about what is being repressed. I mean, what sort of thing this structure, the grid, allows to be suspended in the aesthetic process, what set of incompatible feelings can be suspended there but not integrated, not reconciled. Those sorts of questions are absolutely out of the ball game of what was always understood as the task of practical criticism. I am not interested in whether this particular Mondrian of 1921 is better or worse than the other one of 1921. I am really interested in the structure of this set of irreconcilable and incompatible terms which seem to me to be enlightened, for instance, by Lévi-Strauss's discussion of the structure of myth.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: I would call that interpretation, though, Rosalind. Why is that not interpretation?

ROSALIND KRAUSS: It is interpretation of a transcultural phenomenon, of something that really goes on over and over and over again. It really dissolves the integrity of the individual work. I mean I know that, for instance, Clement Greenberg would say that what I'm doing is not criticism, and he's right. It's not. I'm not saying this is a good Mondrian, this Mondrian is fabulous because X, Y, and Z. I am not addressing myself to that; I am not addressing myself to the way in which it functions formally and succeeds aesthetically. That is not my set of questions. My point is that in fact people have performed certain kinds of structuralist analyses, in fact in this case of visual work. It cannot be said that what they're doing when they do that is criticism. I think what they're doing when they're doing that is very interesting, in fact fascinating, but it's not criticism.

STANLEY CAVELL: Let me specify two things that I think would need to be known in order to make an evaluation of the future of these theories. First, apart from Derrida and Barthes, one needs to be aware of the eighteen other writers in contemporary Paris with whom they are in continuous conversation on every page. Otherwise you don't know what the cross fire is—that is, quite apart from political opinions, political commitment, from political fantasy. It's hard enough to articulate just what the vocabulary is doing, apart from which the texts must seem to us irresponsible. The opening of the *Grammatology* must seem to us like something you would just mark up with a red pencil, apart from knowing where these particular words come from. My second point concerns the effect of these thinkers on our academic institutions. People like Barthes and Derrida are the writers whom some students one cares about very

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much read. That is of interest to us. It's a fear; it terrorizes some people.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Before we close I would like to present some facts. Far from being suppressed in this country, structuralist writing and thinking has been spreading enormously and rapidly, and certainly in the universities. Obviously it's not spreading in the market place but if we can judge by *Partisan Review*, we are flooded by structuralist pieces, the way years ago you had Marxist approaches, women's approaches, black approaches, gay approaches, and so on. It is taking the proportions of a tide among teachers and graduate students, and I think we have to revise what seems to me a paranoid theory of censorship. Ten years ago *Partisan Review* began to carry pieces explaining structuralism, as well as pieces by Barthes and Foucault. It never occurred to us to censor those.

PETER BROOKS: Since I introduced the idea of censorship, I should justify myself. What I mean precisely is a foreclosure, perhaps repression would be the best word, of the kind of responsible, intelligent investigatory cultural discussion of these works that Stanley Cavell was talking about, precisely by the people who had some idea that there were eighteen other voices crisscrossing the text of Derrida's work, not people who have read a couple of essays in translation and extract the essence from the philosophy of Derrida and indeed do tag them and label them. I don't recognize structuralism in a great deal of the work that's been discussed this morning but that's not a point I want to pursue at the moment. It seems to me that what's happened, and we're all aware of it, is the strange division of labor. There's been an industry created around people like Derrida in the academy but there has been, I'll change my word from censorship to repression, outside, partly because, as Stanley Cavell was suggesting, this is enormously threatening stuff if you take it seriously.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: But Peter, isn't there a contradiction? You're really describing this as a highly specialized discipline and at the same time you're saying that there's some kind of—not censorship but repression—preventing this work from reaching slightly more popular levels. I don't know that established critics really represent the popular thinking in this country.

PETER BROOKS: I see what you're saying and I see the thrust of that but it seems to me that if you say that this is some of the most interesting work that's going on in our time, and in some places it's taken the place that experimental work held in poetry and the novel in earlier generations, then it seems to me the organs of high mass culture have

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a responsibility to discuss it seriously and find the people who can discuss it seriously.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: May I make a practical suggestion? Why don't you have a group protest sent to a list of magazines, *The New York Review of Books, The Hudson Review, The Kenyon Review,* and so on, saying they have ignored this.

PETER BROOKS: *Partisan Review*!

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Peter's on the editorial board of *Partisan Review.*

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Art Criticism

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: This session is devoted to the state of contemporary art criticism. Clement Greenberg has played a leading role in the development of contemporary art criticism. I was going to say that he's the father of contemporary art criticism, but I thought it would make him feel too old. Donald Kuspit is coeditor of *Art Criticism*—a new magazine and a good one. Clement Greenberg will talk first.

Clement Greenberg

Value judgments constitute the substance of aesthetic experience. I don't want to argue this assertion. I point to it as a fact, the fact that identifies the presence, the reality in experience of the aesthetic. I don't want to argue, either, about the nature of aesthetic value judgments. They are acts of intuition, and intuition remains unanalyzable.

The fact of aesthetic intuition, as distinguished from other kinds of intuition, has, for lack of a better word, to be called Taste. This word has acquired unfortunate connotations since the nineteenth century, for what are really irrelevant reasons. That great literary critic F.R. Leavis, while insisting on the primacy of value judgment, avoided the word for—as it seems to me—fear of these connotations. Instead, he resorted to "sensibility" or circumlocutions like "feeling for value" or "sense of value." (I may not be quoting with exactness, but I'm not misrepresenting.) I want to try to rehabilitate the word; Taste is the handiest term for what's meant, and somehow the bluntest—in part precisely because of the disrepute into which it has fallen. The word drives home the fact that art is first of all, and most of all, a question of liking and of not liking—just so. Liking and not liking have to do with value, and nothing else.

It's as though the shying away from the use of the word, Taste, had been a portent of the present general tendency to shy away from what it, or its synonyms, means. There is a reluctance nowadays to express value judgments in criticism—at least in criticism of painting and

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sculpture, and maybe of some of the other arts too.* I mean outspoken value judgments, judgments that can be discussed. Implied judgments abound, and have to: they decide usually (though by no means always) what items, or occasions, of art critics give their attention to. But implied judgments don't get discussed enough, they don't get put on the table. Art will get explained, analyzed, interpreted, historically situated, sociologically or politically accounted for, but the responses that bring art into experience as art, and not something else—these will go unmentioned.

Need they be mentioned? Only in so far as it's art as art, and not anything else, that's to be talked about. Sure, art can be talked about as something else: as document, as symptom, as sheer phenomenon. And it does get talked about that way more and more, and by critics no less than by art historians and by philosophers and psychologists. There's nothing necessarily wrong in this. Only it's not criticism. Criticism proper means dealing in the first place with art as art, which means dealing with value judgments. Otherwise criticism becomes something else. Not that it is to be so narrowly defined as to have to exclude interpretation, description, analysis, etc.; only that it must, if it's to be criticism, include evaluation, and evaluation in the first place—for the sake of art, for the sake of everything art is that isn't information or exhortation, for the sake of what's in art's gift alone.

To experience art as art is—again—to evaluate, to make, or rather receive, value judgments, consciously and unconsciously. (A value judgment doesn't mean a formulation or statement, a putting of something into thoughts and words; a value judgment takes place; the thoughts and words come afterwards.) The critic happens to be under the obligation to report his value judgments. These will be the truth, for him, of the art he discusses. It will also, most often, make for the greatest relevance, and greatest interest, of what he says or writes.

*E.D. Hirsch, Jr. in *The New York Review of Books* (14 June 1979): "Ever since Plato, literary theory has concerned itself almost exclusively with the problem of value, e.g., 'Are the ancients better than the moderns?' 'Are standards of judgment universal?' You can read through virtually all the major works of the important literary critics before the twentieth century without finding an extended discussion of the problem of interpretation. In Britain, writers like Sidney, Pope, Hume, Johnson, Coleridge, and Arnold . . . asked of a piece of writing, 'Is it good?' or 'Why is it good?' rather than 'What does it mean?'

"By contrast, ever since the revolution begun by the New Critics during the 1940s, and the enormous increase in the numbers of academic interpreters over the past forty years, the question of value has fallen into the background. . . ."

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Though I grant that the issue of what's interesting here may be a moot point for a lot of people.

I realize that I'm simplifying. But I'm not oversimplifying. I'm stating flatly what hasn't been stated flatly enough, or often enough with emphasis. But then the primacy of value judgment in art criticism used to be taken so much as a matter of course that it didn't have to be stated, much less stated emphatically. The last great art critics I'm aware of—Julius Meier-Graefe and Roger Fry—simply assumed it, just as E.D. Hirsch's literary critics did. And it is still assumed, as far as I can see, in music and architectural criticism, and in literary reviewing as distinct from "serious" literary criticism, as it isn't in art criticism or even art reviewing. Which is why I don't feel I'm laboring the obvious when I harp on the primacy of value judgment in the present context. Didn't the late Harold Rosenberg say that Taste was an "obsolete concept"? Didn't another reputable art critic refer recently to the weighing of the quality of specific works of art as "art mysticism"?

To be sure, value judgments of a certain kind—more than enough of them—are to be met with in the current art press. But they are not aesthetic value judgments. The values invoked are those of sheerly phenomenal newness, or of "objectness," or "information," or "process," or of purported demonstrations of the hows of perceiving and knowing, or of acts and things by which our notion of what's possible as art is expanded. The critics who take these values or claims to value seriously *ipso facto* exclude any appeal to aesthetic value, whether they realize it or not. To judge from their rhetoric, more often they don't. I said earlier that implied value judgments abound, and I meant value judgments that were properly aesthetic, for better or for worse. I want to correct myself somewhat. Being for the new simply because it's new, or being for a certain kind of art simply because it's in vogue, doesn't entail an aesthetic value judgment. Nor does rejecting what seems old-fashioned simply because it seems that. (Categorical judgments are in any case never truly aesthetic ones.) What's involved here is something I'd call aesthetic incapacity: the incapacity lies in letting irrelevant factors like newness and oldness shut off aesthetic experience, inhibit the operations of Taste. This amounts to, has amounted to, a kind of judgment *on* aesthetic experience itself. And it's this judgment, this disparaging judgment, that seems to control too much of what's offered as criticism of contemporary fine art.

Of course, there's more, and should be more, to art criticism than the expressing of value judgments. Description, analysis, and interpretation, even interpretation, have their place. But without value judg-

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ment these can become arid, or rather they stop being criticism. (A bad work of art can offer as much for description, analysis, and interpretation—yes, interpretation—as a good work of art. It's possible to go on as long about a failed Goya as about a successful one.) As Meier-Graefe and Fry show us, description and analysis can carry value judgments with them, implicitly and otherwise. The literary criticism of F.R. Leavis shows that too, eminently. Donald Francis Tovey, in writing about music, shows it comparably. (It takes nothing away from Tovey to suggest that music, of all arts, seems most to compel the critic to evaluate as he describes or analyzes.)

But what about the extraaesthetic contexts of art: social, political, economic, philosophical, biographical, etc., etc.? The historical moment? Don't they have to be brought in? And how can aesthetic value be kept enough in sight in such contexts? It doesn't have to be. For when such contexts are brought to the fore it's no longer criticism that's being practiced. It's something else, something that can be valuable, something that can be necessary. But it's not criticism. And let those who occupy themselves with such contexts not think they're doing criticism; or that they're rendering criticism proper unnecessary.

I want now to enter a plea for the discipline of aesthetics. It's become routine lately to refer disparagingly to aesthetics, and there may be some justification. When you see the aesthetical lucubrations of a philosopher like Nelson Goodman treated with respect by others in the field you want to throw up your hands and conclude that anything can be gotten away with here, just as in art criticism. But that's not the whole story. Certainly artists don't need to be acquainted with aesthetics. However, it might be of help to those who teach art—acquaintance, that is, with the right kind of aesthetics, the kind that shows you what it's possible to say relevantly about art or aesthetic experience and what it's not possible to say relevantly. Acquaintance with this kind of aesthetics would most certainly be of help to a critic. It might lead him to keep more firmly in mind that aesthetic value judgments can't be demonstrated in a way that would compel agreement; consequently, that in the last resort it's his reader's or listener's taste that he has to appeal to, not his reason or understanding. The critic might also be brought, with the help of aesthetics, to see more clearly what his own experience only too often doesn't bring him to see at all: namely, that content and form can never be adequately differentiated, since the term *form* is always somewhat indefinite in application, while the term *content* is of no definiteness at all. An awareness of this might head off a lot of vain controversy. (It might also keep someone like Joshua

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Taylor, in his recent *The Fine Arts in America,* from referring to the "intense concern for content, not method, that characterized" the "procedures" of the Abstract Expressionists. This is also what comes of taking artists at their word.)

Some critics would also do well to consult a dictionary oftener. They might look up the word *gestural,* for example, and discover what a solecism they commit when they talk of *gestural* painting. Is it conceivable for a painting to be made by means of gestures? Can a material object—or for that matter, a poem or a song—be created, fashioned, or altered by gestures?

It "signifies" that the appelation *art critic* has been narrowed down now to one who criticizes contemporary and recent art alone. When you deal with art further back in time you get to be called an art historian rather than an art critic. It was not always that way; it wasn't that way for Julius Meier-Graefe, or Roger Fry, or André Lhote, all three of whom wrote about past and present indiscriminately, and it was only ignorance that called any one of them art historian. Now it's also become assumed that an art historian proper is not to engage in criticism, not to express value judgments, but keep to scholarship and interpretation. As a consequence, painting and sculpture of the more than recent past get less and less evaluated or reevaluated, less and less criticized as *art.* There are exceptions, but that's just what they are: exceptions.

The case doesn't appear to be the same with music. There the productions of the past continue day in and day out to be evaluated and reevaluated along with those of the present, and to a great extent by the same people, whether musicologists or just plain music critics. Nor is the situation that much the same in literature either, despite all the truth there is in what E.D. Hirsch says. Literature of the past still does get discussed often enough in terms of aesthetic value. And while most literary scholars proper may not come near contemporary or very recent literature, literary critics still range between past and present with their value judgments, and do so as a matter of course, taking it for granted that without keeping an eye on the past it would be impossible to keep Taste sharp enough for the present. Of course there are exceptions here, but these are mainly reviewers, not literary critics proper, and not taken seriously—as, alas, their counterparts in the field of art are.

The difference for current art writing stems, I feel, from what's become the entrenched assumption that modern, modernist painting and sculpture have broken with the past more radically and abruptly

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than any other modernism has. The assumption is wrong, just as the notion of a radical break as defining modernism itself is wrong. This doesn't make the assumption any the less prevalent, as it has been for a long time. I remember Paolo Milano—an Italian man of letters and as cultivated a person as I've ever known—telling me back in the 1940s how surprised he was to gather from a review of mine in *The Nation* that I saw modernist art as not fundamentally or even phenomenally different in kind from art of the past; that was new to him. (His remark made me realize that originally I myself had made the same assumption to the contrary and had come to abandon it only unconsciously. In that *Nation* review I'd not at all made a point of indicating this change of view, I hadn't even known I was indicating it.) Anyhow a large consequence of this assumption of a radical, epochal break between the visual art of modernism and that of the past is, finally, the further assumption that the former has made value judgment, made Taste, irrelevant in dealing with painting and sculpture.

As I said in the beginning, even when it comes to current and recent art, criticism is ceasing to be criticism proper, ceasing to judge and assess. Look at the magazines devoted to contemporary visual art and see how more and more of the articles that fill them are scholarly or would-be scholarly, would-be high-brow in the academic way: explicative and descriptive, or historical, or interpretative, but hardly at all judicial, evaluative. Notice the proliferation of foot and tail notes, and how they attest to recondite reading, most of which has nothing to do with art as art. Meanwhile the value judging is pocketed off in the spot reviews (where even so, there's always a certain coyness enforced by the art magazines' large dependence on art dealers' advertising—for which, things being as they are, the magazines can't be censured). On the other hand there's now and then the laudatory or apologetic article about a given artist or artists which has to contain value judgments. Yet these are couched less and less in aesthetic terms. Aesthetic quality as such is no longer enough to warrant praise; other, extraaesthetic values have to be invoked: historical, political, social, ideological, moral of course, and what not. But what's new about that?

What's new is something else. That the value in itself, the autonomous value, of the aesthetic wasn't asserted so often in the past, at least in the Western past, doesn't mean that we're permitted to keep on doing the same. We've eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. The more ruthless examination and cross-examination of inner experience, the more searching introspection, that have gone with the advance (if it

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can be called that) of rationality have shown well enough that the aesthetic is an intrinsic, ultimate, and autonomous value.* Art for Art's Sake has helped, and so have 200-odd years of aesthetics, both of them giving much and taking away enough. There's no excuse now for not realizing that when the absolute value of the aesthetic is doubted, the reality itself of the aesthetic is doubted, the absoluteness being inseparable from the reality. Just as this reality is there and can't be thought away, so the status of that value is there and can't be thought away.

Bearing this in mind can make the doing of art criticism—of any kind of aesthetic criticism—difficult. It means writing about art as art before anything else. And it does seem easier to write and talk about art as something else. I know it's easier for me. But it doesn't catch my interest much when I read or hear that kind of writing or talk. Almost, if not quite, I can do without it.

Donald B. Kuspit

There are two assumptions—and they are that because they are dogmatically urged more than they are logically argued—at the core of Clement Greenberg's paper, assumptions which twine around one another like the snakes of a caduceus. The first is that criticism must be outspokenly evaluative if it is to be worth the name. The second is that its value judgments articulate aesthetic intuitions. The first implies a Herculean effort on Greenberg's part to clean the Augean stables of current criticism, glutted by various kinds of descriptive, analytic, and above all interpretative approaches to art, which all tend to view it contextually and culturally—every which way but aesthetically. The second assumption is meant to buttress and qualify the first one by acknowledging the irreducible operative in aesthetic value judgment, namely intuition, which alone is able to be aware of quality in art. I will try to demonstrate the inadequacy of Greenberg's

*This doesn't mean the same thing as *supreme* value. To claim this was the Art for Art's Sakers' unnecessary mistake. The great Charles Peirce did, however, argue that whatever is valued for its own sole sake, even when it's a supreme sake—like human life—has in the showdown to be understood as being valued aesthetically: in other words, anything valued as an end in itself, as something other than a means or instrument, is experienced in the aesthetic mode. Which isn't to say that absolute values have equal status. All the art that's ever been made isn't worth the life of a single human being.

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conception of aesthetic intuition, partly in the spirit in which Gadamer says "we need to overcome the concept of aesthetics itself," and partly to show that Greenberg does not offer us the aesthetics we do need, even if that need is more an afterthought of our consciousness of art than inherent in it. I will then circle back to the original intention of Greenberg's paper, namely the attempt to define "true" criticism—or rather, what amounts to the same thing, to reinstate what he regards as the traditional function of criticism—and show that, despite its usefulness in reminding us that art criticism in practice has gotten wildly out of hand, the idea of criticism as qualitative evaluation of art is not only a half-truth but one which mocks the whole truth. Greenberg importunately totalizes evaluation in the hope of detotalizing interpretation, but in so doing he falsifies the roles of both, and thereby the complex nature and spirit of the critical enterprise as such.

Everything that Greenberg tells us about aesthetic intuition has already been told us by Kant, and more clearly and systematically. Greenberg's characterization of aesthetic intuition as "unanalyzable," "prearticulate," "transhistorical," and "intrinsic, ultimate, and autonomous" paraphrases Kant's conception of taste or aesthetic judgment. This can be demonstrated even more pointedly. Greenberg argues that the contemporary critic would be helped by an acquaintance with "the right kind of aesthetics," which "might lead him to keep more firmly in mind that aesthetic value judgments can't be demonstrated in a way that would compel agreement; consequently that in the last resort it's his reader's or listener's taste that he has to appeal to, not his reason or understanding." Compare this with Gadamer's summary of Kant's achievement in the third *Critique*:

> In the subjective universality of the aesthetic judgment of taste, he [Kant] discovered the powerful and legitimate claim to independence that aesthetic judgment can make over against the claims of the understanding and morality. The taste of the observer can no more be comprehended as the application of concepts, norms, or rules than the genius of the artist can.

Presumably the genius of the critic resides in the intuitions of his taste. The key point is the subjective absoluteness—the subjective universality—of genius and taste, an absoluteness not only self-justifying (this is the full weight of Greenberg's characterization of aesthetic intuition as "intrinsic, ultimate, and autonomous") but in no need of explication (its unanalyzability). Such absoluteness guarantees the existence of "art as art": the "absolute value of the aesthetic,"

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coincidental with the "autonomous value of the aesthetic," argues for art—aesthetic value—as an end in itself.

But the question is the extent to which the assumption of the independence of the aesthetic can be sustained: the nature of the ground on which the conception of the hermetic absoluteness of art rests. The moment that ground is suspect, cognitive and moral considerations enter into the judgment of taste. They seem more relevant to art than they did when the subjective universality of the aesthetic judgment of taste was guaranteed. The ground—"the metaphysical horizon," as Gadamer calls it—on which the subjective universality of aesthetic intuition rests, and therefore the independence of art, is "a teleological order of being." Without the assumption of a teleological ordering of art, its absoluteness—the autonomy of the aesthetic—cannot be assumed. The teleological assumption disintegrates the moment we recognize it as what Kant himself saw it to be, a "transcendental illusion" satisfying the human need for completeness, reaching beyond experience to an absolute ordering of being. Greenberg's whole treatment of art—not particularly in his current paper, but in his practical criticism—is permeated by a teleological approach to art, giving it an order which guarantees the absoluteness of his aesthetic intuitions. He has never comprehended that this order, seemingly "a universal ontological horizon" for art, is a pragmatic guideline rather than a logical necessity. In Jamesian terms, it is an expression of an intense "will to believe" in art even when there is seemingly no existential reason to believe in it, and when it itself seems to have no necessary reason for being. Greenberg in effect mutes the Pascalian wager which underlies—one might even say motivates—his whole "intuition" of art by a sense of it as a determinate order, credible because of its universality. But that determinate universality is itself credible only by reason of the purposiveness of art that it presupposes.

In any case, acknowledgment of the transcendental illusion on which the assumption of the subjective universality of taste rests destroys the concept of the autonomy of art, as well as the concept of aesthetic intuition. The moment the absoluteness of art and aesthetic judgment can be logically denied, the particularity of works of art reveal themselves anew, not under the auspices of a teleological assumption, but through relative contexts and interpretations, relative descriptions and analyses. Thus, Greenberg's conception of aesthetic intuition turns out, in practice, to be countercritical, for it stifles awareness of artistic particularities, and, worse yet, shows itself to be anti-intellectual, for it gives short shrift to every method, however relative, of generating consciousness of art. Taste is anti-intellectual

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because it refers to the relativity that consciousness of the particularity of art gives us, but this does not excuse it. Ultimately, the approach to art through aesthetic intuition, yearning as it does for the metaphysical absoluteness or ontological independence of art, is more uncritical of art than the most naive description of it. Or perhaps the results of aesthetic intuition are the most naive description of it.

What is the alternative—what is true criticism? Is there any reconciliation between taste and interpretation, between the evaluative and the descriptive? Greenberg has given us a half-truth, bifurcating criticism into true and false parts. But in the current paper he seems to do more than make a distinction: the wisdom of Solomon decides to cut supposedly infantile art criticism in half, assuming that the better half will live. But there is another solution, which Greenberg himself would have recognized, had his take on Kant not been so limited, as we have already shown. What Greenberg does not recognize is that taste is a numinous concept, that is, a heuristic, regulatory device, a revelation of the "ideal" limits of art. The judgment of taste no longer has to stand on its absoluteness or universality to make itself good. Its value is that it clears a field of art—without presupposing its teleological necessity, its existence as a completely determinate, completely purposive order. Taste is that "clearing of being" Heidegger spoke of,

> which first represents the realm in which beings are known as disclosed in their unhiddenness. This coming forth of beings into the "there" of their Dasein obviously presupposes a realm of openness in which such a 'there' can occur. And yet it is just as obvious that this realm does not exist without beings manifesting themselves in it, that is, without there being a place of openness that openness occupies.

Taste is that clearing of being in which artistic beings appear, are disclosed in their unhiddenness. The reciprocity between taste and artistic beings is crucial: there is no clearing in which the artistic beings are disclosed (however hidden they remain). I see this view of taste as the redemption of aesthetic intuition, and a way of reconciling it—as Greenberg refuses to do—with the varieties of interpretative analysis of art. For, as Heidegger asserts, the work of art, like every other being, is a "conflict between revealment and concealment": its truth is always their "opposition." As Heidegger says, "Being contains something like hostility to its own presentations," and it is crucial to the task of criticism not only to make a clearing in consciousness for the kind of beings works of art are by means of aesthetically intuitive taste, but also to attempt, through so-called interpretation—a word as

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inadequate as "taste"—to present and re-present works of art, attempting to overcome their hostility to their existing presentations in consciousness. Criticism overcomes the concealment of art by exploiting its compulsion for revealment. It grasps the work of art by playing its concealment against its revealment. Aesthetic intuition sets the stage for this hermeneutic game. The folly of Greenberg's position in his current paper is that an obsolete conception of taste used as a source for the autonomy of art has led him to falsify the total critical enterprise. The moment that he begins to see that taste is necessary to art, not as a sign of its autonomy, but as the first step in its revelation, he will once again become truly critical, and will comprehend the fullness that criticism can attain. Using the idea of intuitive taste to buttress the idea of art for art's sake he cannot begin to be a critic, for he cannot begin to see the world that, as Heidegger says, arises in the work of art, like an event—and with a thrust that mocks the entire question of the independence or dependence, absoluteness or contingency, of art.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Clem, you have a chance to answer these weighty assertions.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Thanks, Mr. Kuspit. I didn't mean that ironically, either. You know aesthetic intuition shares its impenetrability of analysis with ordinary intuition, with intuition in the first place. We can't analyze what takes place in us when we see blue as blue, what takes place in consciousness. We may be able to decide what takes place in our irises and retinas. But we can't analyze what takes place in consciousness when we touch something and that goes for the rest of the senses. And so aesthetic intuition doesn't enjoy a privileged place by reason of its impermeability to discursive or conceptual analysis. So much for that. The absoluteness I talk of is not a metaphysical absoluteness, it's the absoluteness of experience. Aesthetic experience is not privileged in this respect either. It just happens. Aesthetic experience is not confined to made art. It is not confined to what the Greeks called *techne.* Anything that enters experience except aesthetic experience itself can be experienced aesthetically. Aesthetic experience is not privileged. Aesthetic intuition, taste (and Mr. Kuspit quite properly called me on this informally yesterday) is formed, it's developed. Maybe sharpness of hearing can be developed, I don't know. Aesthetic experience is developed. We may be born with a capacity for it, but we don't all necessarily develop it. I don't believe any human being in possession

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of his or her full senses is without aesthetic experience. There's nothing metaphysical here. To say that something is absolute is not to give it metaphysical status. As far as Heidegger is concerned, I have to confess that I don't have the competence to say that Heidegger is largely full of hot air. I'm not competent to say that and I know that dismissing Heidegger as hot air is vulgar and ignorant, but I have to confess further that I didn't understand in terms that were useful to me, or could be useful to me, or, were I hypothetically to accept them, that I would make sense of, what Mr. Kuspit meant or what Heidegger meant as quoted by Mr. Kuspit. That's all.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I'd like to start off by asking you a question, Clem. I was wondering how you would conceive of the relation between the taste or intuition of individuals and collective taste.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: That question is one that Croce dodged, and Croce was one of the greatest aestheticians. Susanne Langer is serious and good and it's a question she dodges too. Santayana, too. The question is whether taste, or judgments, or aesthetic value judgments are subjective or objective. Kant, and it shows his mettle, faced it head on and he had to posit something called *sensus communis,* a common sense that all human beings shared. I don't think he solved it. He let it go. I retreat to experience like a good American. I've noticed that such a thing has emerged, a long time ago, as a consensus of taste. It's very pragmatic. When it comes to, let's say, Western painting, you may not like this or that about Raphael, but if you can see painting, by God you know Raphael was a very great painter and you know Michelangelo was too and Titian and Pierot and Giotto and Rubens and so forth. This consensus of taste recreates itself constantly. New generations arise and we more or less think the old masters aren't that good or we want to change, radically change, the hierarchy, and we do to some extent. We may put Pierot up much higher than we used to; since the nineteenth century we've put Masaccio and Giotto up higher than they were at the beginning. That goes on all the time and it's part of the necessary process of reevaluation, but we don't overturn the overall consensus.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: If there is no other question immediately, I'll ask another one. It seems to me that you derive a great deal of weight and emphasis from experience as well as from original capacity and intuition.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: The consensus over the ages is formed by those who care most, spend most time, try hardest, get closest. It's an elitist consensus. Alas, alas, alas. I mean that word to come up. Of course it's an elitist consensus. And didn't Marx himself say it required

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comfortable, dignified leisure in order to cultivate the arts properly? It's a sad fact of human existence up to now, or let's say urban existence.

DONALD KUSPIT: Clem, does this consensus issue in a necessary and singular hierarchy of value of works of art?

CLEMENT GREENBERG: There are differences in evaluation among different artists, and ups and downs, but within the consensus, there's a certain floor below which the great old masters don't fall. You might say that some of Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican aren't that good, but even so Raphael doesn't fall too far.

DONALD KUSPIT: Weren't there at least two centuries in which Raphael was put down? There were about three centuries in which Dürer was put down as a mere technician. What do you do with those centuries?

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Has there been progress in the arts? There has been progress in taste because taste has become more catholic. Taste is supposed to be catholic. Good taste is catholic taste. Good taste likes anything that's good and dislikes anything that's bad, regardless of where it comes from, and it doesn't proscribe verisimilitude and it doesn't proscribe abstraction. It's ready—taste at its best, in its fullest sense, likes whatever is good, regardless of where it comes from. Taste is involuntary.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: My question is on the same subject, about historical shifting of value judgments. I think perhaps you passed too lightly over your statement that Giotto and Masaccio had gone up since the nineteenth century. I would pursue the question of whether there aren't changes in the faculty of seeing art or the faculty of hearing music, and how these come about. I think that kind of change, that kind of historical shift in consensus, whether it's elitist or not, is something we have also experienced in our own lives. Can taste or can the eye be educated? One thing I would want to connect with that is the question of the relation between the changing patterns of the historical consensus and contemporary work. When you have the beginning of abstraction in painting or the beginnings of experimental work in literature, you begin not only to see things in earlier works that you couldn't see before, but in a sense you also create a different tradition. Suddenly you have a new vocabulary with which to reevaluate past works.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Let me say first that aesthetic experience is never dependent on the tools of discourse. We may not have a concept for something, but you still experience it. What is curious here is whether ways of seeing or hearing change radically. I doubt it, but all these rediscoveries—the rediscovery of Giotto in the nineteenth

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century, the rediscovery of Masaccio, Vermeer, and la Tour—were rediscoveries of people who were hailed in their own lifetimes.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: But think of the many people who were famous in their own lifetimes who haven't been rediscovered or whom we still can't see.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: On the whole, the consensus comes out confirmed in each new generation. Old gaps are filled in, certain protuberances become depressions. But by and large the landscape isn't revolutionized.

RODOLFO CARDONA: How does the recognition that this or that painter belongs to the canon of the people that we should respect and like ultimately help, whom does it help?

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Well, I have to be elementary here, Mr. Cardona. All that helps is looking at a lot of art since you can't learn to see. You can't learn to get poetry unless you read it, you can't learn to hear music unless you listen to it, and so forth. You look, and that's how you learn.

KEITH BOTSFORD: Just to change the subject very briefly: in the last hour we heard the most extraordinary scission of language between two people talking about art. Mr. Greenberg spoke in language that we all understood and then Mr. Kuspit came out with a very highly charged philosophical language. Mr. Greenberg said—he was talking about Heidegger, but he must also have been referring to Mr. Kuspit—that he didn't feel this was of great use to him personally as an art critic. I have a question that puzzles me. Do you, Mr. Kuspit, feel that what Mr. Greenberg says does not speak to *you* as an art critic, or is simply too rudimentary?

DONALD KUSPIT: Yes, I feel it is too rudimentary. I feel that Clem is too concerned with the room at the top and the room always turns out to be claustrophobic regardless of how much room there is. I feel the issues are more complicated. There are certain philosophical issues about the status of the concept of intuition which I feel are at stake. Excepting a very elementary political idea, there's no being that escapes discourse or language. Clem seems to imply that there's an intuitive experience that does.

KEITH BOTSFORD: I was asking something about language. Is there any sense in which those of us who are not professional art critics could in any possible way reconcile the two languages that were used?

CLEMENT GREENBERG: I won't exclude language, Donald, I don't exclude it.

DONALD KUSPIT: I did in the latter part of my paper try to introduce the idea of some reconciliation of taste and interpretation. If we look at

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Baudelaire, we find that many people said Baudelaire was wrong about the artists he acknowledged, but so what? Even if he was right it didn't matter. What he had to say was certainly extraordinarily interesting and valuable.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: I'll say the same for Ruskin, one of the greatest handlers of language I'm aware of. I'll disagree with Ruskin around the clock, and yet I find he's a delight to read and not just because of his language.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: It seems to me that what Donald Kuspit is saying is that other factors enter into a judgment besides what Clement Greenberg is calling intuition and taste. I think it might be interesting if you could try to specify what other factors get in and how they relate to judgment.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: Your whole being is involved in aesthetic intuition. You don't look with your eye alone, you don't read with your understanding.

DONALD KUSPIT: Codes enter in. What we call cultural logic enters in. Now how you specify that cultural logic, whether you use a language of codes and lingusitic terminology or use dialectical methodology is not an issue.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: I happen to agree. It's developed intuition, but there it is. Intuition is there.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: I would like to ask Mr. Greenberg how we might reasonably expect to get frank and lusty criticism of modern art when those of us who have been in art history class and read art history and music history are constantly being bombarded with information about the mistakes of the past: how the critics in the 1860s and 1870s misunderstood Manet and so forth.

CLEMENT GREENBERG: The history of these mistakes began only in the 1860s. Before that most artists of merit were recognized fairly soon. It was only in the 1860s—it started with Baudelaire, Flaubert, and especially Manet—that the better you were, in a sense, the longer you had to wait for recognition. That's a modernist phenomenon and it still holds true today. The rule hasn't been broken and I hope to see it broken any moment. It's recent. Now the fact that so many mistakes were made within the past 150 years or so is not supposed to frighten us. We still look at art for ourselves, we still hear music for ourselves, we read for ourselves maybe. It's a nice challenge, being aware that you're liable to make a fool of yourself or your taste, certainly an incentive to an art critic to bet his eye against the future. All too many art critics are afraid to do that.

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Criticism of Popular Culture

ROGER SHATTUCK: This last section is on the criticism of popular culture, and there are three participants. The first speaker is Richard Gilman who is a professor of drama at Yale, and the work for which he is widely known is *The Making of Modern Drama.* And he has recently published a book called *Decadence.* He is a man of the theater, a working critic, and he recently received the Morton Dauwen Zabel Award in criticism, awarded by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese is a professor at Rochester and she is at work on two books—one of them on fashion, the other on Marxism and history (in collaboration with her husband). The last speaker is Keith Botsford, who is the author of four novels, and is the motor racing correspondent for the Sunday *Times.*

Richard Gilman

I can understand how for the purposes of this conference my subject should have been given to me as though it were an actuality, or at least a real possibility, as though a substantial body of criticism of what some people rightly or not choose to call popular culture already exists or is something we have only to turn our minds to in order to create. But for a number of reasons I think the matter is a good deal more complicated than that, as well as being extremely treacherous. The difficulties begin, it seems to me, with the question, what in fact is popular culture and go on to the related question of how—whatever we decide it is—does or can criticism, as we have known it or can imagine it, deal with that?

In the first place, I doubt whether many of us are comfortable with the term *popular culture,* which for several reasons I think inaccurate and misleading, as well as condescending. The term *mass culture* is obnoxious in another way, with its denotation of something gray, undifferentiated and morose. Moreover, on the tongues of most of those who like to use it the designation implies a lofty superiority, a distaste

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for the present and a nostalgia for some putatively "purer" and nobler time. With all this in mind, it seems to me that the word *entertainment* is a better one than *popular* or *mass* culture. It too of course has certain difficulties and incurs some losses, but it's at least freer of the leveling or deadening or falsely sanguine action of those other terms, and freer too of *parti pris*. *Entertaining* is a more supple word, one that can be useful to describe a quality of art and imagination across a broad spectrum, a word whose resonances might help to reduce the puritanical strain in academic considerations of culture, and might even be useful in resolving some of the seemingly irreconcilable differences between critics and adherents of so-called "high" and "low" cultures. *Entertainment* is a category—since we have to have one, that is sufficiently supple to contain the essentials of what I have to say, even though in these remarks I shall continue also to use the words *popular* or *low* or *mass* culture because others use them and the implications of these uses make up, as you can see, one of the subjects of my talk. Which now properly begins.

Is there a body of criticism of popular culture or entertainment or at any rate of imaginative expression which for one reason or another people of purportedly "higher" taste and fuller learning tend to exclude from what is thought of as serious expression or art; is there a body of such criticism that meets or approaches the criteria that have been traditionally held up for criticism in general? You'll notice that I say nothing at this point about whether or not such exclusion is justified or whether or not the criteria are worth preserving; those things remain for a later stage of my remarks.

We all know that there has been a great deal of serious writing—I'm not talking about reviewing—in recent years about these ostensibly less serious forms on the part of people we recognize as critics, or scholars, or who claim the name or some other name for the broad activity. Conferences and symposia proliferate on the subject and there is even a *Journal of Popular Culture* which at first glance looks very much like many journals of "dignified" culture such as *Partisan Review* and about which I shall be talking at considerable length later on.

The truth is that a very large proportion of this writing and discussion, nearly all of it it sometimes seems, has been either advocacy, aggressive or rather embarrassed, or, in an older and more familiar vein, denigration. To write or speak about popular or mass forms of expression, about entertainment, hasn't often been an act of inquiry—except on a sociological or psychological level, and then seldom with

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any astuteness—but rather one of assertion; such argument invariably states a position, a stance.

There is a small and perhaps growing body of writing by people who take popular culture seriously (as I do myself, I might say, though not always for the same reasons), writing which while by no means free of political or sociological bias and special pleading does at least recognizably constitute something like criticism in the broad sense of the word. I'm talking now about the writing of some of those people, nearly all academics, who have taken up "low" culture as a subject, instituting courses in it, to the disgruntlement and even dismay of their traditionalist colleagues, setting about simultaneously to legitimate these studies and ward off the attacks of the elitists, and filling the pages of their chief forum (*Journal of Popular Culture*) with their essays, reviews and manifestoes.

I might remark at this point that I've chosen to concentrate in this talk on the *Journal of Popular Culture* because I think it representative and not because I think it official. Most of the writers for the *Journal of Popular Culture*, as far as I can see, don't call themselves critics, it being apparently almost a point of pride as well as a piece of strategy not to; "specialists" in or "analysts" of popular culture is the designation I have most often seen them apply to themselves. Well, whatever they call themselves, some of them are producing a type of what I would call "precriticism" (though others might see it as "post"), the most serious and thoughtful among them being engaged precisely in trying to work out a basis, hitherto, as they acknowledge, lacking in these studies, for what any kind of criticism has to have, namely an aesthetic, or, if that word has lost its usefulness, a set of principles of investigation, a philosophy of form, a structure of values, without which any discussion of art works—though not of course discussions of the theory of art works—is either mere description, by which I mean recapitulation, or the expression of incalculable, hermetic "taste."

The enterprise is an extremely interesting one and is an endeavor to which those of us who represent the various traditional "higher" branches of aesthetics, in other words the ones that have been propounded through trial and error and hard thinking and openness of response, ought to be sympathetic and not scornful. The work is carried out against great difficulties, the obduracy of the subject itself being the most fundamental. I shall return to that, but here I want to point out how these would-be aestheticians or analysts of entertainment are also beset in a way that traditionalists seldom are, by the unwillingness of many of their confreres to grant that such a task is

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necessary or desirable. Aesthetics are aesthetics, the conservative position goes, it's all been settled, in the sense that whatever theory of aesthetics you hold you at least have to agree that certain works are worthy of being considered aesthetically and others aren't. No wonder so many low culture specialists wish to purge the word from their vocabularies, so fraught is it with implications of high or aristocratic culture.

In any event, those popular culture specialists who have retained the word, or some equivalent of it, are, rightly I think, convinced that a true criticism of their subject will never be possible until it's accepted that sociological or psychological findings cannot begin to exhaust, or even really identify, its truths. The more intelligent and less belligerent critics of popular culture understand that whatever you wish to call it, "aesthetic" or something else, there is a realm or dimension in human activity to ignore which is to be reduced—as a critic or analyst—to a kind of massing of data of much the same sort as other disciplines are already engaged in collecting; it is, in fact, to relinquish the function of the critic as we have known it.

In a perceptive essay called "Notes Toward an Aesthetic of Popular Culture" John Cawelti pointed out a few years ago that "high art is commonly treated as esthetic structure or individual vision; the popular arts are studied as sociological and psychological data." It is his purpose to try to correct this by suggesting principles and approaches that would enable the critic of entertainment (whether or not he calls himself that) to illuminate how the things he is considering actually work as imaginative expression, while keeping his eye on what makes them different from art as more purely personal vision or aesthetic structure. To this end he recommends an analytical method which recognizes the limitations placed on popular art by social and economic pressures, arguing, among other things, that the auteur approach—which he describes as "the examination of the entire body of work (of a best-selling author, for example, or a long-running TV series) for recurrent stylistic and thematic patterns rather than the isolated analysis of the individual work in its unique totality"—that this approach is particularly well suited to the low culture critic.

This serious effort to forge a productive criticism of popular culture finds itself compelled to acknowledge, as Cawelti does, that no such criticism can be instituted from scratch, as so many of his companions in the field think it can. In another essay in the *Journal of Popular Culture,* David Madden goes even further in insisting that his colleagues have to ground their work on the various aesthetics that

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already exist. "What I am advocating here," he writes, "is that we start from traditional esthetics as it deals with high art and discover what is unique or different in the popular art esthetic experience, and then adapt to popular culture those traditional concepts that are found to apply."

This is all very well. I admire the reasonableness and humility of writers like Cawelti and Madden. But they, and others like them, are besieged within their discipline, as they like to call it and as I see no reason for not calling it. To begin with, they are, as I have said, in the minority; most writers on popular culture, in or out of their quasi-official journal, seem to consider the word "aesthetic," as well as "critic" and "criticism," to be too heavily tainted to serve their purposes. When they do use them they do it with a clear intention of showing how unlike tradition these uses are. More often, as I've remarked, they prefer the words "study" or "analysis."

As most of them would be likely not only to admit but to proclaim, their approach and methods are far closer to those of the sociologist or psychologist than to those of the critic as we have known him. More than that, their enterprise, avowed or implicit, is to a large degree a politically inspired one: to celebrate their subject as the successor to, or at least the rival of, the high, formal, "aristocratic" culture of the past, the culture of which criticism, as an act of understanding and exegesis, was an integral part. "Popular art represents the triumph of a democratic aesthetic," Roger Rollin, one of their most articulate spokesmen, has written.

Now the phrase "democratic aesthetic" presents many troubles to the mind, and I shall return to these later on. But first I want to comment a bit more generally on Rollin's essay, which is entitled "Against Evaluation: The Role of the Critic of Popular Culture," and which seems to me, for its evident intelligence, its fiercely unaccomodating spirit of partisanship, and its extraordinary blind spots, extremely useful for an understanding of the position and dilemmas of those professional students of and commentators on what I shall have to continue to call "popular culture" until my chosen word, "entertainment," can make a more appropriate entrance.

After arguing that evaluation, the business of giving grades or ratings to cultural works, ought not be any part of the function of popular culture criticism, as he says it is part of the function of high criticism (to which one might reply that if it is a major function, it oughtn't to be, either), Rollin gets down to what he thinks his business and that of his co-workers truly is. This turns out to be a straightfor-

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ward and unashamed demotic and statistical approach, entirely stripped of value judgments and keeping its attention fixed on "facts." "No serious student of Popular Culture," he writes, "can lose time, money or energy by tuning in on 'Rhoda,' paying to see *Jaws*, or skimming through Harold Robbins' latest opus. Because for such students these activities are . . . 'research,' and whether they entail pleasure or pain is immaterial."

"The only evaluation which counts," he goes on, "is the strictly quantitative one: how large a proportion of the work's potential audience responded to it positively. Did it receive a respectable Nielsen rating? Did *Variety* rate it a box office success? Did it appear on the bestseller list? . . . [for] the only real authority concerning the 'beauty or excellence' of a work of Popular Culture is the people . . . in Popular Culture the rule is 'one person-one vote.' However regrettable this may appear to professional students, it is a fact of the discipline."

This is honest enough, and while I don't presume that Rollin speaks for all his colleagues—he is evidently in this essay wielding a whip to bring some of them into line—he does express what I take to be the dominant or normative position. One might expect that quantification would be an essential element in such studies, and quantification is of course something of an anathema to criticism of the usual historical kind. Those of us who have practiced that craft, or art, or rhetoric, naturally find repellent the notion that numbers can play any central role in our considerations. When David Madden, who is clearly one of the dissidents Rollin is addressing but who is also infected by the idea of quantity, writes that "the use of statistics is more suitable for popular art than for high art" we can only shake our heads at the word "more."

As I say, we should not be surprised at this grounding of popular culture studies in statistics; since they are inspired by a democratic morale, and since democracy entails, at least theoretically, the forging of values by consensus, art or culture has no exemption from this rule. What art and culture become under this sort of scrutiny is obviously something very different from what we have known, but that is just the point: the subjects of popular culture studies or criticism are chosen because of their difference from what was considered worthy of study before, the ineligible being given status and significance such as were previously denied to them.

There is a problem here apart from the obvious one of the relation between quantities and personal values (which, I might remark, have a way of sneaking back into the work of many of these writers) and that is

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the question of what exactly should popular culture critics or scholars criticize or make an object of study.

The pages of the *Journal of Popular Culture* reveal how far they are from settling the question or even making its contours clear. Apart from the kind of essay I've cited, they are filled with at best extremely curious descriptive accounts of out of the way "low" cultural phenomena and at worst with heavy, painfully earnest discussions—though no heavier nor more painful than much of what one sees in most "respectable" academic journals—of such things as the role of the automobile in *The Great Gatsby* and with earnest, painfully naive interviews with writers like Harold Robbins or radio-TV personalities such as Ozzie and Harriet. The latter article concludes with a judgment by the interviewers that "through the magic of television re-runs, 'The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet' offers its viewers entertainment, an escape from the drudgery of living and, perhaps most of all, a reaffirmation of timeless values such as honesty, integrity and human respect."

I would not want to be misunderstood. I don't think the ragbag nature of the *Journal of Popular Culture* and its more flagrant sillinesses are due to some intellectual or editorial incapacity or perversity but to a nearly total confusion about what it is these specialists are supposed to be studying and what they expect to find. Critics of traditional culture have been fairly clear about what culture is—Matthew Arnold said it was "a study of perfection"—which is at least a thought—but popular culture, as a field of inquiry, sometimes seems to be indistinguishable from human activity in its entirety, with the exception of course of "high" art.

This is what leads Herbert Gans in his book *Popular Culture and High Culture* to include as elements of the field of his inquiry "refrigerators, cars, news and sports," and led John Dewey, not one of my favorite writers on aesthetics, I might say, to write that "the most vital arts are popular music, comic strips, newspaper accounts of crime and love, articles on the intimate doings of popular entertainers" and a host of other things including the most matter-of-fact everyday activities. A writer in the *Journal of Popular Culture* quotes Dewey's list approvingly and this seems to me indicative of the confusion that is so characteristic of that magazine. If everything is culture or art, then why do we need the words? If art is life and life art, as I know has been a fashionable formula for some years, then there is nothing to distinguish anything from anything else and the task of criticism, which I think is to make distinctions, is without point.

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Still, there are a handful of critics, or observers, of popular culture who have been able to circumscribe their investigations, narrowing them down to subjects that at least share with those of high culture the fact that they are imaginative creations and not primarily utilitarian ones. They are critics, in other words, of popular art and not of artifacts, though the line naturally is sometimes hard to draw. And it is just here, at a point where the critic of popular culture does know what his subject is—Hollywood movies, say, or popular music or bestselling literature or television drama—and where such a critic understands that there is an aesthetic dimension to culture and can finally come to grips with his material as art—"low" if you want to call it that—and not primarily sociology—it is just here that the real problems of such a critic begin. And the real, perhaps irreconcilable differences between the criticism of high and democratic culture become most apparent.

In the essay I cited before John Cawelti quotes Hall and Whannel as arguing in their book, *The Popular Arts*, that the first condition of an art of broad appeal is "the essential conventionality which makes it widely understood and appreciated by stressing the repetition or performance of something already known rather than the creation of something new." In the same vein Russel Nye has written that "the popular artist corroborates (occasionally with great skill and intensity) values and attitudes already familiar to his audience; his aim is less to provide a new experience than to validate an older one." And finally in an essay entitled "Popular Culture and Methodology," Donald Dunlop talks about the formulary nature of popular art and the necessary and perfectly acceptable role in it of what he calls "the middleman"—the editor, the producer, and so on—and goes on to say that "when . . . the formula or certain conventions within the formula fail to attract or satisfy the audience, the popular artist and the middleman attempt to modify or alter the formula or its conventions."

You will notice that Dunlop doesn't say that the artist and middleman might or ought to abandon the formula in their search for approval. As a critic of popular culture he is in no position to do so, for the very nature of popular art is that it is composed of formulas and conventions. Now it isn't my purpose here to decry this truth but simply to try to point out how it operates as a huge difficulty for criticism. To begin with, success in the popular arts, popularity in other words, accrues to whomever best manipulates the formulas and conventions, or, if manipulation is too pejorative a word, lightens their pressure toward mere repetition. Originality, a very high value in traditional criticism, is to be defined now not as creation beyond what

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is already known, new vision, but as a maneuver within the already existent, the stockpile, stretching the formula a bit, for example, or rearranging the conventions so that they may cover new subjects or be made to include new ideas (usually taken from high culture, as we know). Such a type of originality can be seen in the way so-called "adult" westerns altered the arrangements of the older genre while remaining basically within them. I'm aware of the challenge to the idea of originality that has been posed by recent French literary thought, but this seems to me another matter: in Derrida, for example, the attack upon originality is directed toward the writer, or rather the idea of the writer as demiurge, in the interests of *writing*, whose originality, or lack of it, seems to me to be unaffected by anything the theoreticians have said.

The necessity to stay within the realm of the known is the condition, as I say, of all popular culture or, as I shall begin to call it now, entertainment. The heavy commercial and social pressures that affect entertainment can be described as the demands of democracy as both a spiritual and a material system and it is these demands that reduce so radically the area of freedom to invent, to be personal. Since this is so it makes great sense that an approach like that of the auteurs should recommend itself to the critics of entertainment. For if the only area of freedom remaining to the makers of entertainment is that of the smuggler's cove, where illicit goods, goods that have escaped paying the taxes due on them, are brought in, then to trace the careers of these smugglers is indeed a fascinating enterprise. Whether or not it is criticism is another question.

We know that André Bazin himself came to have serious doubts about the uses to which some of his suggestions had been put. The question so many seem to be ignoring, he said, is just the one of what is the quality of these themes and patterns that are being traced. I haven't the time for it, but I would like to be able to examine the practice of auteurism in the case of a director like Hitchcock, in the attempt to justify someone upon whom so many intellectual malfeasances have been perpetrated.

Implicit in the idea of entertainment I have been offering is a crucial truth that goes to the heart of my subject. I said at the beginning that we have to ask ourselves how criticism deals or can deal with creations that do not qualify, for good or ill, as art or culture in an older sense. In this regard I want to quote John Cawelti once more when he offers a definition of entertainment (his word) as "a highly controlled experience which puts us through an intense series of

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emotions which immediately dissipate upon the conclusion of the experience." This is an idea which I have seen expressed again and again in one form or another by observers of popular culture, few of whom, however, seem to me to recognize the full implications for criticism of what they are saying.

If entertainment is the sort of impermanent, self-consuming experience that most of us would, I think, agree it is, and if, furthermore, the experience is entirely contained within known boundaries, then what role is left for criticism? As we have known and practiced it criticism has been in very large part the separation of the enduring from the transitory—in some modest sense criticism itself is an element of a criticized work's endurance, the pointing out of the new and its relation to the known, and the analysis or explication precisely of how the work of art extends past one's immediate experience of it to enter a dimension of permanence, so that it exists in fact as a source of relief from time and its erosions. I don't mean to suggest that these things are all criticism does, only that I can't imagine a criticism worthy of the name that doesn't do them.

The notion of art as permanence, as existing somehow outside of time, contains, I know, an implication of the museum, together with a sort of curatorial function for criticism, and indeed a certain type of scholarly criticism does approach its subject in that way. One of the objections to "elitist" art is just that it creates a separation between action and contemplation, so that it is not of the moment and resides, damningly, in "another world." I believe it does reside there, in a way, purposefully, savingly, but I am not defending that here. It may well be that entertainment is destined to replace by its swift, unpreservable actions the repertoire of solid, stationary objects to which high art keeps adding. My point here is simply that entertainment resists criticism, at any rate criticism as we have known it.

To try to analyze the structures or motifs of a work of entertainment (in the definition I've given of it) is to be faced with something whose structures and motifs pass out of existence as soon as they display themselves. Or, more accurately, they pass into the realm of the psychological or sociological, more broadly the historical. All that can be analyzed or even discussed are the ways in which the emotions raised by entertainment are in fact raised; nothing can really be said about the quality of the emotions, or, as is crucial to criticism, the relationship of these emotions to thought. I would define consciousness as just that—thought and emotion in relationship—and I said earlier that entertainment leaves consciousness in the same condition in which it found it. By any definition I can imagine art changes consciousness or adds to it,

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and criticism in one of its functions is the formal recognition and description of those increments.

Where such increments do not exist in works, where the world of experience is simply juggled, or given a shot, so to speak, then we are in the presence of melodrama, in the case of narrative we're in the presence, to take an example of something which a serious and energetic theorist of popular culture, David Thorburn, has tried desperately to justify, of "Kojak." Now the point about "Kojak" is that its methods or procedures, its values, are precisely those of the very lowest, by which I mean mechanical and derivative, genres of traditional "serious" drama; they are predictable, and the point about predictability in literature is that it makes the work unnecessary: the illusion of its necessity, that which encourages people to go on adding to our storehouse of identical souls with different external details, different noses or waistlines, it may be, springs from the confusion, which Henry James once pointed out, between sensation and consciousness. Sensation, literally the physical acting as the whole of reality, is, in art or imaginative endeavor, the sad agency of the impulse to posit life as though it had no other means of positing itself. Much entertainment is of this order: the invention of familiarity, the enactment of what has already been enacted.

I spoke before of the fact that entertainment passes immediately into history in a way that art doesn't, although art naturally has a historic dimension as well. I would suggest now that the bulk of what is ostensibly criticism of entertainment is really a form of historical writing, or notation, a description of phenomena not as they pass, which is reviewing, but as they have recently passed. I don't mean any of this in an invidious sense, for I think entertainment is as proper a subject for discussion as any other. But historical writing is not criticism.

I think I understand why students and analysts of entertainment should be so drawn toward history, or rather the writing of it. It isn't simply because entertainment has been neglected as a legitimate subject but because the democratic ethos that lies behind popular culture studies exerts a pressure towards quantitative or material signification at the expense of, or as a direct attack upon, aesthetic interpretation. It is a pressure towards the horizontal instead of the vertical, if you will, and it is a pressure towards the real, the measurable. In this regard I want to quote once more from the essay by Roger Rollin I cited earlier. In arguing for quantitative values as being proper to popular culture studies he writes: "By traditional esthetic standards, *Cries and Whispers* is an art movie—not only good but

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'important.' But by the test of time, that flanking movement of the defenders of hierarchical standards, *Deep Throat* (conceivably) might prove to be *more* important than *Cries and Whispers* in film history, and possibly even a 'better' film in some future history of film esthetics."

Rollin might have chosen a worthier example for his "art" film, since *Cries and Whispers* is much more arty than it is artful and is among Bergman's least impressive achievements. But we know what he means. He means that historically *Deep Throat* may be more significant (we sense that he *knows* it is) than any acclaimed work of cinema art because it changed society directly, by moving against the barriers of censorship, "opening up" the screen, and hence life, to previously forbidden subjects. Well, that is surely significant and a proper subject for study. But when Rollin goes on to suggest that *Deep Throat* may some day be considered to have been a "better" film aesthetically than acknowledged works of cinema art he is draining the word "better" of any meaning we have ever attached to it. He may be right. It may some day come about that all values in culture will have this new quantitative, "practical," and exclusively historical meaning, but if such a time arrives then criticism will have no function whatsoever.

I don't want to end without mentioning a figure some of you might have expected me to talk about at some length, and that is Roland Barthes. Many people consider Barthes to have written a type of criticism of aspects of popular culture that can be a model for the future. I don't think so for a number of reasons. In the first place I don't think Barthes is really, or at least not primarily, a critic, but what I would call a philosopher of the imagination. His theory of literature, his "methodology," which will be superseded one of these days by another, seems to me to be far less important than his wit, his perceptiveness and vigor of mind, qualities that can scarcely be borrowed by others. Or, if I am wrong, and he is indeed a critic, then I would say that he is a highly unreliable one. His famous essay on wrestling, for example, has a splendor to it but it isn't a splendor of accurate perception, as anyone who has observed wrestling will know. He is simply wrong about a lot of what goes on in this species of entertainment and wrong in his interpretations of what motivates its audiences. But of course he is not interested in being accurate but in playing with myths; wrestling was an occasion for his play of mind, but to treat works of culture as such occasions is a dangerous practice for a critic, or at least for criticism. In any case I think what Barthes did was not so much criticize popular culture as place it, speak of its

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relation to other things, above all call our attention to the complex interrelatedness of everything we call culture.

As I said before I don't believe there's a war between popular culture or entertainment and "high" art, if indeed the adjective means anything now; I would prefer to use the description "serious" instead of high. But at the same time I don't think the two kinds of culture can live in great comfort together. There will always be a tension between culture that is simply possessed and that which is earned after an effort, a tension between the merely entertaining, that which, as the hapless interviewers of Ozzie and Harriet rightly said, makes one forget the drudgery of life, and that which puts one in touch with the mysteries and painfulness and astonishments of life.

One is free to choose as one wishes, and most of us choose both, the swift obliterations of entertainment and the lasting though no less entertaining actions of art. I think this division will remain and as long as it does criticism, hierarchical or elitist, or shedding such conditions by acting from a desire not to defend but simply to make known, will have a place. Camus once said that if the world were clear we would not need art, to which I would add that if art were always clear we wouldn't need criticism. The unclarity of art is the cost of its detachment from the obvious clarities—the received wisdom—of life . . . and criticism at its best helps us pay that cost.

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese

I do not really share Mr. Gilman's concern that we shall lack an adequately sophisticated criticism of popular culture. Popular culture may still command inadequate critical attention, but it is beginning to generate a fairly sophisticated criticism. The trouble is that that criticism—in which I am not including reviewing—is heavily objectifying. The pioneers in the criticism of popular culture include not merely Barthes, but also the Birmingham School, following the leadership of Stuart Hall, and the semiotic film critics such as Christian Metz and the group around *Screen*. Even the luminaries of Yale are contributing their bit with the work of Fredric Jameson and David Grossvogel.

The main difficulties with the criticism of popular culture lie elsewhere and remain closely entwined with questions of attitude—

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which ultimately means politics. The problem of numbers—call it mass, call it democratization—may evoke fear, denigration, romanticization, or glorification. But the criticism of popular culture has yet to generate very many serious and identificatory voices. In other words, the critical establishment has yet to engage popular culture as an articulation of itself and its concerns. The socially and culturally engaged critic cannot afford to reject popular culture as alien, for that culture is systematically tied to the nature and possibilities of high culture itself.

The new poetics permits discussing popular culture in terms of its structures and signs and, thereby, permits comparison between high and popular culture in the same terms. It further permits an attention to what I should call cultural density—intertextuality, if you prefer—the elements of overlay and repetition in contemporary culture. But any interpretation or explanation must eschew the danger of treating the text, or cultural product, as manifestation or confirmation of some theory of human behavior or symbolization. Popular culture can provide just as good fodder for such concerns as high culture—and has.

To the extent that the language of criticism becomes increasingly self-referential—an invitation to virtuosity—all critical language risks flattening the objects of its discourse. To the extent that high and popular culture can interchangeably function as the raw material for one or another critical exposition, the differences between them recede before the critical exercise itself. And here I must return to Mr. Gilman's preoccupation with distinguishing between high and popular culture.

I have tried to suggest that the broad understanding of culture would include all symbolic and ritual human activities. This reading of culture really comprises all attempts to give meaning to human life. If such a reading is accepted, then surely it becomes invidious, not to say politically dangerous, to rank levels of culture. Such rankings reduce culture to one or another hierarchical ordering that invariably indentify high culture with the rich, well born, or well promoted—the elite in contradistinction to the mass. In this context, assessing popular culture turns in part on assessments of spontaneity and manipulation: does popular culture express the authentic sensibility of the populace or does it embody an attempt to shape—i.e. distort—popular consciousness? Or, more to the point, as in the case of Afro-American religion, does it represent a complex blending of the two? There are also difficult questions of medium, form, and content which I cannot pretend to address today—how do we evaluate television? Nor am I

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willing to tackle what should or should not be included under the rubric of culture, since that is, in large measure, simply a question of definition. Mr. Gilman, moreover, seems implicitly to be defending a definition of culture as art, or aesthetic experience. And once we get down to music, literature, painting, theater, film, whatever, presumably we get down to questions of good and bad.

Mr. Gilman, to be sure, does not put it so bluntly. He substitutes a notion of difficulty that assumes a special relationship between author and reader that entails the production and appropriation of values or a vision that is somehow wrested from time—a position not unlike that of Marcuse. I should be prepared to agree that the illusion of timelessness—of a truth of human experience or symbolic perception—may be a valid component of aesthetic experience. Nonetheless, those timeless moments are always historically produced, and their referents always have an element of historical specificity.

To claim to sever art from history, or from social process, which is the same thing, is to claim for art the status of the sacred, to substitute it for religion as the privileged custodian of eternal truth. But the values enshrined in art are not merely historically rooted, they are, as Mr. Gilman insists, personal values—overwhelmingly in our tradition those of dominant white males.

I do not count myself among those who would reject the great tradition or standards of taste and execution outright. I do, however, believe that our critical assessment of our most accomplished and enduring cultural products can only gain from the understanding that they result from a privileged subjectivity that enjoyed the prerogative of speaking for the collectivity within a cultural system that reinforced its special claims. High culture, to be sure, always remained, in some measure, hostage to popular culture—even when the relations between the two derived as much from opposition as from affinity. And the great "original" vision invariably articulated themes that preoccupied society as a whole. In short, both the production of culture and the themes of culture are social phenomena—which is not to say that the particular articulation is in any sense determined.

But it is worth noting that the changing conditions that have generated the massive popular culture industry of contemporary society have also generated changes in the production of high culture as well. And these changes themselves betoken social change. We are all too historically self-conscious to ignore the social embeddedness of culture.

I should be prepared to argue that the criticism of popular culture

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can—if it does not already—participate in the critical discourse of high culture. And, if the first instance, the more easily it does so, the more difficult will become the judgments and discriminations that Mr. Gilman would defend. In the measure that criticism becomes largely an academic exercise, popular culture can serve as well as high culture as the object of its attention. But this initial assimilation of popular to high culture via the critical language will not suffice. It can only neutralize the very objects and processes criticism is supposed to elucidate.

In our day, popular culture has become incontrovertibly assimilated to mass culture with all the attendant implications of mass reproduction and commercialization. This process has facilitated elitist disdain. Recognition of the process, moreover, precludes mindless romanticization of popular culture, the production of which entails profound distortions of the mainsprings of popular life and consciousness even when it becomes a feature of that life and consciousness. But the appropriation and re-presentation of human life, complete with its unconscious dynamics, also becomes part of the experience of society as a whole, including those who believe themselves committed to a high culture altogether innocent of such contamination. In fact, throughout Western cultural history, themes and strands of popular culture have worked themselves into the most celebrated monuments of high culture—one has only to evoke Rabelais, Shakespeare, Dickens. The folk tales, fairy stories, and so forth, widely taken to encode collective unconscious fears and wishes in shared, structured fantasies, have served to color the childhoods of the most original geniuses with the tones of popular life. The comic books and films that today take their place may have less appeal to cultured adults, but they represent a functional equivalent. If we indeed judge them so lacking in taste or in moral fabric as to be dangerous to the reproduction of our values—which means of our ethical and political culture—then we should turn our attention to the criticism of the social relations that produce them rather than pretending that we can escape into a high culture immune to the society which produces it.

Keith Botsford

Popular culture embraces all the things that people want, rather than feel they ought to have. As such, it comprises all the things

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which people feel competent to judge. This judgment is as to whether or not something has given pleasure, sometimes known as entertainment. There is no authority on popular culture, only a perpetual running guide.

In terms of "criticism," popular culture provides for most people their first taste of the act of distinguishing X from Y, or relating X to Y, of describing and evaluating. That is because popular culture is directly related to the market place; at its origin is the impulse to consume culture. The criticism of popular culture is a sort of buyers' guide, and it is the only form of contemporary criticism in which those who take part in the cultural act of devouring the works of culture are also involved in discussion about the works. Almost all objects of popular culture are simultaneously shared by an audience and discussed critically. Few people come out of a movie without saying, "I thought that was good," or "that was bad." It may not be sophisticated criticism, but there is nothing wrong in letting the consumer have some say in criticism. Feet won't move to a sluggish beat, television that does not entertain is switched off.

Because of this relation to the market place, popular culture is, today, directly related to a set of needs. There is the need of the artist to eat, not at the expense of foundations, but because he has earned his bread by providing what an audience wanted; there is the need of the audience to have that which will give it that peculiar alternative to daily life which we call culture. The relationship between these needs was, in the past, a fairly common thing. In happier days, high culture and low were not so far removed from each other: from a *ländler* to a Haydn quartet was no great step.

But popular culture in the twentieth century is not folk culture. Only children create that today, and the objects of their rhyming games are the cultural *objets trouvés* of masscult, of "Star Trek" and "Peanuts" and Punk. I suspect it was ever so: the transmission within the child's global village has always been faster and more efficient than we acknowledge, hence the feast of variations in their words and games. And their common sources. It is not folk culture today because it is not spawned from below, nor very much derived from tradition, but deliberately and consciously created from above. Folk gestures remain—sport is a particular and interesting example—but they too, at least in advanced societies, are quite superbly organized happenings.

But popular culture shares a heritage with folk culture. For instance, it is a culture without authors. It is true that the audience listening to rock music knows who performs it, but it is unlikely to

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know who wrote the music and lyrics. It is one of the functions of criticism of popular culture to provide that information, to create the links between several songs created by the same person.

Popular arts, however, being cultural underdogs, more than a little frowned upon by the stern guardians of high culture, do strive upwards, often to their detriment. And we can begin to distinguish that shift toward high culture and away from folk culture when we begin to recognize authors, creators, composers. A dress by Saint Laurent is not just something you wear, it is a *Saint Laurent.* Newspaper columnists are no longer anonymous. Thus cinema grinds its way upward into high culture: in no small part because of the critical acceptance it has received. By acceptance, I mean space.

For the vast attention popular culture gets *is* by its very nature criticism. Now, rather meanly I think, very few journals of high intent pay attention to sport—unless a writer like Ring Lardner or Norman Mailer writes a piece on it. However, unlike most books, which would probably survive without critical attention, the products of popular culture would not. And that is a sort of paradox: if popular, why do they need attention? But the reason sports writers are cosseted by the purveyors of popular culture in that form, is that they are *needed*: without the several million column-inches spawned by a Muhammad Ali, there'd be few fights to watch.

To my mind, that mutual interdependence between creation and criticism is, at any level of culture, rather more a good thing than a bad. A utopian vision would have book writers, what literary critics are to sports writers, breathlessly considering the injury to Mr. Bellow caused by divorce actions, his witting average, the emergence of a new stance, and that would not only sell books, it might even get people to read them.

But, as you know, the interdependence of criticism and creation that goes on in the popular arts is of a very special kind—a kind that we no longer, to my great regret, practice in high culture. Criticism reveals to the public the living human beings who make up the culture. Readers of *Rolling Stone* know that a large part of popular "criticism" is really thinly disguised biographical material. Pop criticism talks about where Dylan's head is *at.* Had there been articles on where Dylan Thomas's head was at, poetry might not be the special province of English departments. And it is curious that whenever literati gather nothing is of such interest to them as the anecdotica of their profession: who is doing what, who's fallen out with whom, who got how much for what—all this sort of information—which at least has the virtue of

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sharing the human experience of culture with the people who consume it, and who also have anecdotica and oedipal complexes and tax problems—is regularly purveyed. Often, indeed, pop criticism is high level gossip. But, again, not only is that a useful beginning, it is also quite vital in the explicating of the pop-cult product. It *is* the splitting up of rock combinations that produces new sounds. One of the reasons that criticism of popular culture looks at this underside of culture is that pop culture is differentiated from high culture in one very significant way: almost all who consume it are also capable, at some level, of creating it. Everyone sings, everyone enacts scenarios, or tells his girl she's behaving like Diane Keaton.

Everyone plays sports and games. Everyone is his own disc jockey. This does make for a sort of intimacy between creator and consumer that furthers the cultural cause. Composing quartets, on the other hand, is like learning another language; to write on American political-literary history means reading certain books; you can't, or you couldn't, do ballet unless you could balance on your toes. But where the consumer can do, there the consumer will venture into criticism.

Now, that interdependence of creator and consumer makes of popular culture a perpetual *now,* or perhaps even a constant tomorrow. I think there is an understanding in pop-cult, shared by both its creators and its critics, that what they are dealing in is, essentially, ephemera. It is not that it is here today and gone tomorrow, but that it hasn't got a very long shelf life: unless, of course, the critic *revives* it by his attention.

To my mind, this is a very good state of affairs in criticism. I believe that criticism fails when it is written to be enshrined between covers, to last. As Edmund Wilson was fond of pointing out, the critic's task most often was to *react.* And when that reaction was relevant to what was going on *at the time* it was bound to be read and to provoke interest. The magazines he wrote for appeared frequently, they kept one in touch. That was important, and it points up a superiority in popular criticism: that there is little or no gap in time between event and judgment. The public insists on knowing what movie is on and whether it's any good. The situation we allow in book criticism, where a year can elapse from appearance to elaborate critique in a quarterly, contributes to the demise of books as subjects of conversation. But that is not the case with pop-cult, and I think we have something to learn from that.

I have referred before to what could be called the nowness of popular culture. When we criticize in this field, that absence of history,

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of landmarks, also has its value. The objects of popular culture are seldom described in terms of *something else.* It is not necessary when writing about a new situation comedy on ABC to trace its horrid lineage—though it is time we had some television critics who began to understand that *nothing* that is done for the money-culture complex is ever done without reason or without a thorough study of history and its pratfalls—it is only necessary to *see* it, to consume it.

The immediateness, the vividness, the strict relevance to what has been observed, the inclusion of fact and background, that prevail in pop criticism have something to teach us. As does the authority with which it is expressed, the self-confidence of judgment with which it is expressed.

Critics of popular culture know their audience has a short attention span, therefore their prose style is affected by a need to arrest the reader's attention, which in many ways relates them to nineteenth century high culture criticism. Bolinsky, it is clear, conveyed to his readers the excitement of discovering Dostoevsky. And if you read him and didn't go out and pick up Fedor's book you were just not part of the scene. So it is that the pop criticism scene has become a breeding ground for the rather more exciting writing, stylistically, imagistically, linguistically, in America today. Personally, I'd turn them loose on high culture, but that would mean taking chances and breaking the monopoly of the mandarin class and allowing writers, *because* magazines are just ephemera and are themselves more properly a part of popular culture, to make their mistakes in print and learn from them.

Finally, a lot of popular culture is performance, gesture, public statement. The audience for popular culture has no visible limits; it is the totality of all who *can* be reached. That fact—at whatever level popular criticism exists—is deeply relevant. The critic who cannot address a total audience is not, in popular culture, doing his job. He does not thereby have to become stupid, derisory, or simplistic. Just like his high culture equivalent he is making judgments and encouraging the consumption of the good and rejection of the bad. But he has a sense of his own power. That's what attracts so many good young writers to the field. It's a place to exercise influence. It's a way to make culture live. And because his audience is potentially infinite, the critic has to speak in a way his audience can understand. The critic of popular culture is, like any good writer, in touch with the demotic. That never reduced anybody's mind; it just made writing a bit more work. It's not a bad thing to have: this idea that we're talking to a real world out there.

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ROGER SHATTUCK: Well, we've had three very pungent general statements and the convention now is to allow the members of the panel here to say something, and then members of the audience.

RICHARD GILMAN: I'd like to make a couple of comments, especially about what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese said about my talk. First, a general one is that I should have hoped, and I'm not suggesting that it didn't happen, that if conferences of this kind are to have any value at all, they will not have value if they establish positions, defend positions, and so forth. C. Day Lewis once said that sometimes it is better to be shown to be wrong than to be right. Now I think that's important. By wrong and right here, what I mean to say is that all that can be established at any time is that this is likely or that is likely. There are no wrongs or rights and no eternal truths in these subjects. I don't think I was doing one of the things Betsy implied that I was doing, which was to talk about the impossibility or the inappropriateness of criticism to popular culture. I think I was talking about the impossibility or difficulty that I saw for criticism *of a traditional kind* to deal with popular culture. I think I left it open that another kind of treatment of these things may come about if we call it something else. I think I left enough of an implication that criticism, as we have known it, may very well be superseded, may very well have played out its part.

PETER BROOKS: There seems to be an agreement among the speakers that popular culture is ephemeral, or transitory. I couldn't disagree with that more. You can't use ephemerality as a criterion.

RICHARD GILMAN: I was talking about ephemeral things in the mind. Ephemeral in an intellectual realm, or in a psychological realm. George Bernard Shaw once said, talking about the popular London theater, that he went to the theater and found himself bludgeoned into all sorts of emotions, but that after he left it took him only two blocks of walking to shake off those feelings, and then he was left in the state he was in before. I think the point Shaw was making, and one of the points I was making, was that the effects of certain kinds of popular culture, popular literature, popular movies, and so forth, are ephemeral. They do not last. They do not remain in the consciousness. It's my contention that certain articles of what we call popular culture do not live in the memory.

DANIEL AARON: It seems to me that one possible meeting ground of popular culture and high art would be the memory of this popular culture on the minds of artists and writers who, as children, were subjected to these books at a time when their minds were very plastic.

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I can remember myself reading Edgar Rice Burroughs or Frank L. Packard or Achmed Abdullah or Zane Grey and I can quote passages from Achmed Abdullah, rather flamboyant ones. I was delighted with the extreme language and it was the way I think I learned about words. I can remember almost the page where I came across a certain word that I didn't know the meaning of and I've noticed that in writers like, say, Joyce, Eliot, and Pynchon, the effects of that kind of reading get somehow implanted and embedded in their imaginations and consciousnesses.

PETER BROOKS: It seems to me that one of the things Richard Gilman was objecting to when he spoke of the professionals of popular culture, who have their own journal and so on, is precisely that by making it into a profession they isolate it and they draw the frontier very sharply between high and low culture—and that is what we don't want to do. It seems to me that there ought to be a constant skirmish on that frontier. We should be delving into what's known as popular, seeing what is retained by memory, and going back to certain writers who were popular in their time and may be revived. The phenomenon of revival (and the fashion for revival in our time) is something very curious which ought to be studied in itself. I think it's also well not to forget that all the great nineteenth century novelists, with a few exceptions, the main one being Flaubert, who is in another tradition, thought of themselves as popular. Even Henry James and Joseph Conrad wanted to be popular—wanted to be read—and were bitterly disappointed. They couldn't understand why they weren't popular.

RICHARD GILMAN: That's exactly it. I did not mean by popular necessarily well-liked. Dickens was popular, which is why I said I don't like the term popular culture because it is confusing and ambiguous, which is why I'd rather use entertainment.

PETER BROOKS: I think the term entertainment has these problems, too, of drawing a fine line, absolute frontiers where absolute frontiers are not to be drawn.

KEITH BOTSFORD: I think the fate of all objects of popular culture is to become part of high culture. They are simply absorbed.

ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE: One way of thinking about ephemerality is to consider uniformity: the individual product is consumed rapidly, there is a heavy turnover in popular novels, television programs, etc. But if you look closely at problems of plot or character in these things, the repetition among them is extraordinary.

DAVID THORBURN: To my mind, the distinction Richard Gilman has

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drawn between entertainment and art closes the door before you can begin, because if all television programs and all movies and all popular culture objects are entertainment by definition, then we have no critical task before us. And yet Alfred Harbage was engaged in a form of popular culture study when he analyzed Shakespeare. The essence of his scholarship in fact was to put Shakespeare back into the specific commercial and sociological context in which those plays were made, plays that appealed to a kind of consensus audience and that had to obey the rules that Mr. Gilman observes are the rules that popular culture always has to obey. The basic structure of his plays, the genres they inherit, the languages they use, the actors they use—all of these were designed to be forms of popular entertainment, and the audience that was laying out the money knew very well what it was buying. What I want to suggest is that the whole distinction between high and popular culture is a modernist invention. It's the invention of an academy that has been taught to think of art as somehow inaccessible to ordinary people and as somehow the special preserve of professors, and to think of any work that is automatically accessible as falling into the category of popular art. It seems to me that the real issue is that criticism is always necessary. There are good and bad objects, good and bad texts. Maybe a much larger proportion of bad texts or imperfect texts will be written or composed by a system like our television system, but we will never know that until we actually subject those stories to the kind of criticism that we are used to subjecting other forms of drama and narrative to.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: I want to make one small point. I hate to disagree with so impassioned a statement of a position. But it seems to me that there's a certain disregard for history in trying to compare the Shakespearean theater with television. Common sense balks at this identification, but if common sense is not sufficient to make a distinction between these two phenomena, then I must make a few other observations. Is there no distinction, let's say, between John Donne and "Charlie's Angels"? I'm not aware that there were any Nielsen ratings, either for Shakespeare or the Elizabethan theater. Also—I think Dick made this point—you had a real folk theater at the time and a culture in which a folk art and a folk theater were possible. A genuine folk theater may not be impossible now, but it is very unlikely, and I think there are very few instances of it. If you ever talk to anybody who's written television plays or has worked in a television studio, he will explain what the difference is between the solitary act of writing a novel when Keith Botsford writes one or Saul

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Bellow writes one or Bernard Malamud writes one or André Malraux writes one, and what it means to produce, let's say, "Charlie's Angels" or "Gunsmoke" or something for television. You have to run an endless gauntlet, you have to examine an endless number of Nielsen ratings, you have to have pilot projects, everything has to be tailored. Every television writer knows that he's doing something different from what Shakespeare or other writers in the past did. I would suggest that historical facts are part of the idea of history.

DAVID THORBURN: I respect what you're saying, but I think that the failure of history in this case is yours, not mine. Of course a poem by John Donne is not the same thing as "Charlie's Angels," but that's not what I suggested. What I suggested was that the structures and arrangement of the Elizabethan theater bear a very sharp resemblance to certain kinds of arrangements that existed in Hollywood in the era of the great studios and that obtain now in the television industry.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Are there more differences or more similarities between *Hamlet* and "Charlie's Angels"?

DAVID THORBURN: Suppose instead of talking about *Hamlet* and "Charlie's Angels" we talk about *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and "The Rockford Files," for example. Now *A Woman Killed with Kindness* was one of the most popular plays on that stage, and of course there were many far inferior to that. *Hamlet* is one of the great pinnacles of that stage and it seems to me that if we actually talk about the historical—

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: "Charlie's Angels" is one of the pinnacles of television?

DAVID THORBURN: What I'm really suggesting is that a genuinely historical perspective will recognize the extent to which our sentimentality about the originality of the artist and the idea of the artist speaking in a kind of absolute freedom is exactly that, a kind of sentimentality. I think we should recognize that Dickens went out in the street and did a form of audience research and had no delusions about it, especially early in his career. And that the profession of dramatist in Shakespeare's day was held in at least as low an esteem as the profession of television writer is today. What we need to do is to stop categorizing things and saying, "Oh yes, there's this stuff in the university curriculum and there's this stuff that's gobbled up by the masses," because in fact that's what the London Puritans said when they forced the Elizabethan theaters to move outside the city limits. They said about the Elizabethan theater exactly what many high-brows say today about television. What we need to do, I think,

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is to agree to bring to bear on popular forms the kind of critical intelligence that we habitually bring to bear on high art.

AILEEN WARD: What about the question of the function, the responsibility, of criticism on the one hand and the nature of popular culture on the other, as regards two very pressing concerns today: pornography and the cult of violence in popular culture? What does criticism have to do with those two aspects of popular culture?

RICHARD GILMAN: The obvious difficulty for criticism in dealing with pornography or violence is that if you are dedicated or given to a new kind of position in criticism which is acting against value judgments as a function of criticism, then you are helpless. You are lost. You cannot be faithful to your position and say a word about pornography or violence.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS: Let's not ignore the factor of salability. The reason you have violence and pornography on television and in movies is because it sells. Salability is not, as far as I know, an aesthetic criterion.

EUGENE GOODHEART: Haven't we accepted too easily the idea that popular culture is ephemeral? All the instances given have been counterinstances of popular culture lasting in all sorts of ways. In fact it seems to me that the memory of songs, of films, of television dramas that we have all seen is so strong that maybe there's a will to forget them. One wants them to be ephemeral, but they aren't.

RICHARD GILMAN: I think the memory of our own experience of popular culture—of songs, for example, detective stories, the awful books we read as children or the bad book we read now, is not so much of the work as of the state of being we were in when we experienced it. For example, how many times have you recalled the words of a popular song because you wished to evoke the memory of your state of being at a particular time? There is a different kind of memory involved. It's not part of the experience I'm talking about. What you remember is a structure of experience, what you remember then is actually a part of your development. I really would go back to Matthew Arnold in this sense when he speaks about culture as being a quest for perfection.

ROGER SHATTUCK: I'd like to point out that this discussion of ephemerality is addressed entirely to popular works of art, not to popular culture. Certainly popular culture lasts and is not going to disappear. No one has really produced an instance yet of a piece of popular culture, let alone a work of popular art, which has been totally ephemeral, because if we can cite it, it's not ephemeral.

MORRIS DICKSTEIN: I think something that ought to be stressed at this

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point is a kind of middle phenomenon. Keith Botsford described the transfer of ephemeral works into high culture, but no one has mentioned so far the constant transformation of high culture into popular culture. The process goes both ways. Just think, for example, of the changes in the status of the novel in its relatively short history. In the eighteenth century the novel was not part of high culture. As late as 1900 the only novels that went into the public circulating library of the city of London were the novels of George Eliot, because they were the only ones that were considered to have attained a level of high seriousness. What you have is: the novel is low culture or low high culture in the eighteenth century, gradually becomes high culture in the nineteenth century and then, if you're thinking about the realistic novel, or say the historical novel, it descends back into popular culture in the twentieth century. And all the forms like the historical novel that were dominant in the nineteenth century still exist in a kind of subterranean popular life while modernism and other forms of avant-garde have taken over the high culture.

Translating Neruda

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Steven Marcus

COMMENT ON THE STATE OF CRITICISM

My response to William Phillips's paper,* like my response to the situation that it refers to, describes, and tries to appraise, is uneasy. It is impossible to render adequately so complex a set of realities in a simple short account. And, in fact, no one account, short or long, known to me is adequate to the set of circumstances that he, and this meeting, undertake to address.

Colleagues from the outside, from other disciplines, tend to think that we have gone mad; others suggest that there has always been something suicidal in the undertaking of literary criticism and express themselves as not being surprised that we have come to what they perceive as our present confounded state of affairs. I take such friendly comments as truly external, for they fail to see the affiliations among what has been happening in literary criticism, where it comes from in our culture and society, and how it is connected with other developments. Any generalizations on these matters are bound to include some things and persons and exclude others—no single statement or description can cover or make consistent such a multitude of expressions; yet one has no alternative but to try to begin somewhere and hope that more is included than is left out.

My own partly arbitrary choice is to begin provincially, that is to say in our own set of provinces. Although the approximate intellectual origins of the changes that we are discussing lie largely in France (and in some degree behind that in Czechoslovakia and Russia), I want for the moment to direct attention to the intellectual and cultural grounds here that were prepared to receive and cultivate these influences. I see an intervening moment (in the Hegelian sense) between the New Criticism in its most general, institutional sense and the partial installation as its successor in the American academic literary world of one form or another of structuralism. That intervening moment, in my judgment, is to be located in the radicalism of the late 1960s and early 1970s within the University—with its advent and rapid rise, and with

*See *Partisan Review* #3, 1980.

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its failure. The connection I am suggesting is logical as much as it is chronological, since there was undoubtedly a good deal of overlapping between and among these connected phases. In my view there is some substantive connection between the goals and failures of the radical and sometimes absolutist and utopian thinking of some academics who were involved in the political turmoil of a decade ago and the radical relativism and anti-idealism of some considerable parts of the newer academic criticism. The generally gloomy utopianism of a few years ago has given place to the cheerful nihilism of the more recent past and present. In part, the newer criticism is a reflex away from preceding conditions, in part it is a reversal of them; but in part it is a continued expression of a similar bundle of frustrated and aggrieved impulses. One can make out a portion of this continuity in the language used by certain adherents of the newer criticism. They speak of criticism as a liberation, as "a release from the bondage to the past," as deploying itself within an intellectual field in which all boundaries and limits are equally arbitrary and constraining. They sometimes speak about criticism and literature in the language of domination, and a number of them refer to their own criticism as "terroristic." I cannot regard their language entirely as traditional donnish self-inflation—although there is, perhaps, an element of that in it.

There is another, conceivably connected sense in which this self-inflationary tendency is connected with what I am suggesting preceded it. In the wake of the defunct radicalisms, a new interest in individual selfhood arose, and gave rise to a by now comically familiar set of institutions for self-actualization. The inflation of the reader or interpreter in recent criticism, the attempted abolition of the author, the inflation of the text as a function of the reader, and the rendering of everything into a text to be read by the same reader, seem to me to have coherent cultural bearings upon the less academic forms of self-actualization that most of us have been amused by in the culture at large. I want to remind you that I am speaking of cultural tendencies and how they work in a broad way upon non-trivial numbers of people. I am not speaking about the writing alone of several expert critics, but about the way this writing works upon its audiences and these in turn upon their own work.

One can also suggest connections—all too easily and readily perhaps—between the state of criticism and states to be located in the university and higher education in America in general and the state of the humanistic disciplines and their methods of inquiry in particular. Once again one can make out a complex, mediated, and partly inverted

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relation between the sense of crisis, loss, general betrayal, and desertion to be found in and among the traditional humanistic disciplines and their adherents, and some of the more aggressive—and delighted—statements that there is no such thing as determinate knowledge, there is only the pleasant awareness that one is standing upon nothing. To respond to the harsh statement made by modern social reality that humanists have lost their traditional privileges with the statement that there are no privileged discourses, does not, to be sure, shut reality up let alone change it—but it can yield a measure of satisfaction.

In addition, one wants to take into account that it has been some time now since the major figures of the literary wing of the modernist movement have passed from the scene. These major figures have almost all been assimilated through interpretation and analysis into the academic sensibility and curriculum. They no longer represent the challenge to at least immediate understanding that they once did. There are at present no major creative figures of similar stature about. Were such figures about, I suggest, they would tend to direct, as they did in the past, the course of study and the terms of inquiry of much, though not all, of critical activity. That is to say they would themselves be the principal sources of new means of *expression*, and therefore of new modes of perceiving and organizing the human world. In the prolonged absence of such figures (unless one wants to think of Beckett and Genet as the functional contemporary equivalents of Joyce or D.H. Lawrence), criticism sooner or later was bound to move in the directions it has—once more I am proposing a partial determinant and not a global or even full explanatory suggestion.

William Phillips correctly reminds us that one of the most important similarities between the New Criticism and the structuralists is the heavy emphasis that both place on the idea of the text, and the emphasis that both put on linguistics, although they use the term in different senses and refer to different things. In this connection one can sense a split that was latent in the New Criticism coming closer to the surface in the structuralists. This split is to be found among different adherents of the various tendencies, although at times one finds it alternatively within a single writer or a related group of critics. On the one hand, there are those who maintain, at least in part, that the goal of criticism is to become systematic and scientific (although the notion of both system and science vary enormously among different critics as well). The goal of criticism is hence a formal system of some kind, wherein warranted statements may be made about literature in the sense that warranted statements are made in linguistics, Anglo-

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American philosophy, anthropology and sociology. As opposed to this impulse, on the other hand, there are those who place primary emphasis on the notion that such discourses are not privileged at all, and that a pluralism of discourses is the only true and adequate response to the reality of linguistic activities.

These counterpoised tendencies have always existed in literary criticism, as they have in other branches of humanistic inquiry. On the one side, there has always been the impulse, largely academic, to assimilate the discussion of literature to whatever, at any particular time, has been accepted as the dominant view of science. The impulse to describe, classify, fix, analyze, and make systematic accountings of literary forms, structures, expressions, and themes has been a constant (though of variable intensity) in the tradition of critical discourse. On the other side, there has always been the countertendency to state that language and the realities it engages, refers to, turns away from, abstracts, and mediates are too complex and unstable a set of phenomena to be grasped in a single determinate, discursive net. Indeed, the determinate, discursive net, on this account, ordinarily comes to be regarded as unstable and deceptive itself, as indeed it often is.

These opposing tendencies, as I say, have always been present in literary critical discourse. But they have never been more overt or visible than they are now. What worked to make them less visible, and worked as well to make movement back and forth between them possible was precisely what was most visibly missing in the writing of both the New Critics and the structuralists, namely history and the sense of history. History situates itself precisely on the locus of meeting of determinate quasi-scientific discourse, and those discourses that claim a lesser degree of force, if not privilege. William Phillips is right in seeing the banishment of history as a line of continuity in the recent development of literary criticism. In addition, however, one wants to remark that this disregard—a disregard so frequently thoroughgoing as to resemble amnesia—is syntonic with the absence of a sense of history or even of an idea of historical existence in modern and particularly American culture, including academic culture. I have to say that I find it very difficult to imagine literary critics in any sizable number able to resist, let alone counteract or reverse, this massive tendency in modern culture.

The idea of history is connected at various points with those questions of literary judgment which William Phillips places close to the center of his discussion and which he charges both New Critics and structuralists with by-passing or ignoring. He states that both the New

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Critics and the structuralists work with methods that do not "provide the means for judging how good or bad a poem" is or was, and he raises questions about any literary critical "method that does not contain within itself the mechanism for making literary judgments." The problem of judgment, of normative substances, and of normative references is, in my view, central to any large discussion of the nature and fate of literary criticism. And here I have to differ with William Phillips, for I do not think that it can figure centrally *on the level of method.* It seems to me that there is an impassable disjunction between analytic method on the one hand and qualities of judgment on the other. To this Kantian distinction (which I find myself to my own surprise putting forth) I would add the idea of Gödel's proof as an apt or negative metaphor. Gödel's proof in mathematical logic holds that the various branches of mathematics are founded upon propositions or axioms that are not within the systems themselves, or founded upon them or immanent with them. Gödel's proof is directed against the intellectual tyranny of the idea that the systems of mathematics are self-enclosed and self-supporting autonomous languages, and that all of them can be reduced to a series of numerical procedures. It is not directed against the ideas of proofs or determinations in themselves—it does not substitute a pluralism so broad as to be powerless if not anarchic for a monolithic single system. It is, as I have remarked, a metaphor, but it is, I believe, a pertinent one for some of the considerations we have to confront.

In point of fact, William Phillips seems to contradict himself on this matter, for having made his statement about methods containing a means or mechanism for making judgments, he then indicates that judgments cannot be based upon formal considerations. I believe this to be the case. Judgments in literature do involve one's entire experience, they refer from the experience of life to the experiences of a text and back and forth. They are deeply personal without being entirely subjective. They are deeply personal in the sense that in fixing a critical judgment and bringing it forward one is putting one's own most full and highly wrought experience up for the judgment of others. And to avoid the work of judgment is to avoid the risk-taking that putting oneself up for the judgment of others inescapably entails. (In this sense do I understand William Phillips's ambivalent remarks about Marcuse—but I do not have time to elaborate upon this.)

The questions of judgment entail as well questions of meaning. When Phillips quotes Roland Barthes as asserting that "the object of structuralism is not man endowed with meanings, but man fabricating

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meanings," he selects a specimen passage which does incorporate the radical shift in emphasis that is in part the object of our discussion. It is the polarization of these processes in Barthes's statement that in some measure accounts for the radicalism, as it does for the instability and indeterminateness that one feels as impelling forces behind such statements. Yet such statements do amount to simplifications of previously put forward accounts of meaning. For example, it was Max Weber's representative opinion that man was a creature strung up in webs of meaning that were his own creation. That is to say man both fabricates meanings and is endowed with the meanings that he himself has devised or invented. To say this is to be no more paradoxical or mystifying than it is to say that it is in man's nature to create artifacts and civilizations, and that artifacts and civilizations are in fact natural creations of humanity—or any more paradoxical than it is to say that for man the state of nature is society. In other words the systems of meaning—in language, art, ritual, thought, etc.—that human beings live within are both our own creations—our essential artifacts—and the boundaries or constraints within which we comprehensively live. What is peculiar about this circumstance is that we live within and cannot go beyond the very meanings that we ourselves have created—and that creation and discovery in this context are exceptionally difficult to tease apart. In other words, the problematics of epistemological uncertainty and paradoxicality are by no means the same thing as limitless equivalences nor do they necessarily imply them.

A further extension of these problems is to be found in the historically relativist assertion that texts do not have any "permanent nature or value," that they are continually being refabricated, reconstructed, and reinvented by readers. This is certainly true to a considerable degree, but what such a proposition overlooks is the circumstance of permanence itself, that some texts persist as apparently permanent and others do not. Why is it that some texts continually solicit or inspire us to invent and/or discover new meanings in them, while others do not? (Why is it that some texts force themselves upon us as masqueraders; or, to reverse the process, why do we force ourselves upon certain texts and continue to transform their meanings?) Such texts in their apparent permanence and endurance seem to resemble such institutions as marriage and the family—no matter what we do to them or about them, they seem not to go away; they seduce us as if they knew our meanings beforehand, yet they were invented by no one except ourselves.

Which brings us ineluctably back to the idea that one of the major

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tasks of criticism is to be normative, to make judgments as well as offer analyses and descriptions (and I would go on to say that even if it tries not to make explicit judgments, every analysis contains within itself covert judgments and evaluations). This is, I take it, the central insistence of Phillips's paper, and I agree with it. Yet Phillips goes even further, for he proceeds to include literature itself within this view. He assumes that literary works are not primarily texts to be studied or reconstructed, but are instead statements about human existence. I did not think that I would see the day when Matthew Arnold was so resurrected, and in such a context. For how far do we have to move from William Phillips's assertion to the statement that "at bottom literature is a criticism of life." Not very far, I think. And I am not impressed by the vagrant thought that this similarity makes a venerable contemporary appear to be an old fogy, or that Matthew Arnold might on this reading seem like a young fogy. The question of the normative is as difficult to separate from the idea of literary criticism as is the question of the historical.

As a final illustration of the central role of the normative in literary discussion, let me mount a brief comparison. One goal of the Romantic poets and writers, it was often remarked, both by some of them themselves and by others, was to restore a sense of wonder to the world in which they lived. They meant by this that their writings were to reawaken in their readers a freshness of response that the writing of the previous generation of poets had taken for granted and overlooked; but they meant as well that these writings would also work through their readers upon their consciousness in life outside of literature and would have, they hoped, effects upon the conduct of life. I should like to compare this truncatedly stated goal with the permutated appearance that was one of the goals of the Russian formalists. For the formalists art was never a familiar matter; its function was to estrange us from familiarity, to "defamiliarize" the actual or the real. At the same time, according to them, it was imprecise to speak about "the real world," for they asked what indeed is reality? What new art defamiliarizes is prevailing aesthetic convention, a once vital but currently moribund form of art. It says nothing about anything outside of that.

In the formalists' statement the sense of wonder is returning, yet the idiom that it returns in is the language of alienation—indeed it appears to reinstate and reinforce that alienation even as it directs attention to it. The difference between the two formulations is to be found in part in the notion that according to the Romantics' view of things it was possible to envisage a world in which alienation was

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transcended, or if not transcended than ameliorated. They regarded a disalienated condition as at least a possibility for human beings. This seems to be not the case for the formalists and for most of the structuralists and their followers, who appear to regard alienation as permanent or built into the human condition, a state from which there is no recourse (I am returning here to my original point). This latter view would hence tend to deny the very historicity of the category of experience known as estrangement or alienation, and this in itself is a normative judgment of the gravest and most weighty sort.

So it does seem to me that there are generally opposing sides and antagonism here, that there is a substantive set of differences at stake, which appear in the form of cultural issues, that have themselves world and social bearings, which are in turn connected with notions of what one's personal being should be like, which themselves refer back to certain notions of literary and critical style and preference. I do not think that one is compelled to take immediate sides in this encounter, but I do think that we ought to be aware that the sides are there to be taken and that probably, sooner or later, they will have to be taken.

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Alfred Kazin

NEW YORK FROM MELVILLE TO MAILER

My impression is that in New York anything might happen at any moment. In England nothing could happen, ever.
John Sparrow, Warden of All Souls, Oxford

Have you ever seen an inch worm crawl up a leaf or twig, and there clinging to the very end, revolve in the air, feeling for something to reach something? That's like me. I am trying to find something out there beyond the place on which I have a footing.
Albert Pinkham Ryder (visionary painter 1847-1917)

It is because so much happens. Too much happens.
Mrs. Hines in William Faulkner's *Light In August*

In New York who needs an atom bomb? If you walked away from a place they tore it down.
Bernard Malamud, *The Tenants.*

No New York streets are named after Herman Melville, Henry James, Walt Whitman, Edith Wharton. New York does not remember its own; it barely remembers Edgar Allan Poe in Fordham, Mark Twain on lower Fifth Avenue, William Dean Howells on West 57th Street, Stephen Crane in Chelsea, Theodore Dreiser and Eugene O'Neill in Washington Square, Willa Cather on Bank Street, Thomas Wolfe and Marianne Moore in far-off Brooklyn, Hart Crane on Columbia Heights, Allen Tate in the Village, E.E. Cummings in Patchin Place, W.H. Auden in St. Mark's Place, Federico García Lorca at Columbia. It will not remember Ralph Ellison and Saul Bellow on Riverside Drive, Norman Mailer in Columbia Heights, Truman Capote in the U.N. Plaza, Isaac Bashevis Singer on West 86th, any more than it remembers having given shelter to European exiles from Tom Paine to John Butler Yeats, Arshile Gorky to Vladimir Nabokov. It—and you—will be astonished to hear that the following effusion—

My City, my beloved, my white
Ah, slender,

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> Listen! Listen to me, and I will breathe into thee a soul,
> Delicately upon the Teed, attend me—

was written by—Ezra Pound.

New York the city has been one of the great subjects of American writing; more than New England, the South, the West, it has been a great home to American writers as well as their chief marketplace. But New York is so intent on whatever it is that is more important than writing that its writers usually feel as ignorable, evanescent, and despisable as those poor storekeepers on newly smart, renovated Columbus Avenue now being removed because they cannot pay four thousand dollars a month for a grocery that last month rented for nine hundred. "In New York who needs an atom bomb?" someone says in Bernard Malamud's *The Tenants*. "If you walked away from a place they tore it down."

The ever accelerating pace of New York, its historic fury, its extremes of culture and deprivation, ostentation and misery, leave whole segments of the population historically mute, not even aware of a greater life that goes on far away from them at the Manhattan center of the storm. Anonymous particles of dust trudge invisibly within places that could be Yazoo City for all their connection with New York. My parents lived out their lives in total insignificance, not even knowing that a child of theirs might some day speak for them.

But a writer can himself be the wound that remembers. Herman Melville, born to what Edith Wharton called those "qualified by birth to figure in the best society," was always to feel that New York was his nemesis and that living in it again the last twenty-five years of his life, he had to be as indifferent as it was to him. New York uprooted him as a little boy after his father's sudden bankruptcy and death. New York (or the savage ups and downs of economic life that seem New York incarnate) broke up his family, forced him to become a sailor, deserter, adventurer—and thus an author howling against this most hazardous of trades. When he finally confessed his worldly failure as an author and returned to New York in 1866 to eke out a living as a customs inspector, the New York in which he was totally forgotten as an author was somehow bearable *because* it ignored him. He now confined himself to poetry, privately published and paid for by relatives. His anxious wife was afraid to have the family know that he was writing poetry at all, his reputation for instability was already so dark. At the very end, conserving in retirement the energy left him, he wrote the now famous short novel *Billy Budd* that he may not have intended to

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have published at all—long after his death the entangled, barely legible drafts were recovered from a tin box by a graduate student, Raymond Weaver, the first to resurrect Herman Melville.

Yet without all this disorder and early sorrow, without New York "the terrible town" as Henry James called it, Melville might very well have lived the sterile upper-class life that Edith Wharton fled to live in Europe. The protagonist of James's marvelous story "The Jolly Corner," returns to New York from many years abroad to seek what *he* would have been if he had lived the life of his class. He finds it in the ghost of himself, in the old house off Fifth Avenue he grew up in—a figure beautifully elegant in appearance but brutalized and frightening.

Melville was swept out of this life into an oceanic space that for sheer extent and metaphysical terror resembles the outer space into which our astronauts go—those heavenly spaces into which, as Melville well knew, man carries forever the image of himself and tries to transcend it. "The immense concentration of self in the midst of such a heartless immensity, my God! who can tell it!" Melville confronted this self not as Narcissus but as Ahab: strike through the mask! New York was the threshold, the jumping off place. *Moby-Dick* opens at the Battery on "a dreamy Sabbath afternoon, thousands of mortal men fixed right here in ocean reveries." "Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No. They must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in."

This longing for the sailor's life, pointedly compared to Cato throwing himself upon his sword, was all too soon to be crushingly realized by the young boy bound for Liverpool, the sailor on the whaler *Acushnet*. The sea turned out to be the open universe. Beyond the happy valley of the Typees, the Galápagos where he had a premonition of what Darwin was to publish in *The Origin of Species*, of all that mystery buried in "my dear Pacific," lay the enigma of man's relationship to what is forever unchangeable by man. This presses hardest on Americans, the people who thought they could change anything. By contrast New York was the closed world: the fashionable Grace Church on lower Broadway from which Melville describes himself in "The Two Temples" being ejected by the sexton; Wall Street in "Bartleby the Scrivener," where a man had to starve himself to death to demonstrate his freedom; *Pierre*, where in Chapter 22 Melville describes the throes of finishing *Moby-Dick*; finally "The House Top," the extraordinary Coriolanus poem in Melville's *Battle-Pieces* that describes Melville on

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the rooftop of his house in East 26th Street scorning the immigrant mob that in the heat of August, 1863, violently attacked the city in its protest against the draft.

The life of an author in the New York summer! To Hawthorne he wrote in 1851, "In a week or so, I go to New York, to bury myself in a third-story room, and work & slave on my 'Whale' while it is driving thro' the press. That is the only way I can work now—I am so pulled hither and thither by circumstances." Later in the same month: "The Whale is only half through the press; for, wearied with the long delays of the printers, and disgusted with the heat & dust of the Babylonish brick-kiln of New York, I came back to the country to feel the grass, and end the book by reclining on it, if I may." In Chapter 22 of *Pierre* we read: "The chamber was meager even to meanness. No carpet on the floor, no picture on the wall; nothing but a low, long, and very curious-looking single bedstead, that might possibly serve for an indigent bachelor's pallet . . . a wide board of the toughest live-oak, about six feet long, laid upon two upright empty flour-barrels, and loaded with a large bottle of ink, an unfastened bundle of quills, a pen-knife, a folder, and a still unbound ream of foolscap paper, significantly stamped Rule, Blue."

"Now look around at that most miserable room, and at that most miserable of all the pursuits of a man, and say if here be the place, and this be the trade, that God intended him for. A rickety chair, two hollow barrels, a plank, paper, pens, and infernally black ink, four leprously dingy white walls, no carpet, a cup of water, and a dry biscuit or two. . . . Civilization, Philosophy, Ideal Virtue! behold your victim!"

Melville's distrust of authorship extended to his distrust of literature as a vehicle for his agonized search for a constant in the chameleon universe. Failure on failure: *Moby-Dick*, 1851; *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*, 1852; the putative hack novel *Israel Potter*, 1855; *The Piazza Tales*, 1856, first sold to New York magazines for less than $20.00 a story; *The Confidence-Man*, 1857, the last work of prose fiction he was to publish in his lifetime—the book was the end to Melville's career as a professional author as well as the most tangled secret assault on shallow American Christianity as the support of an American optimism that lasts only so long as the money holds out. From 1866 to his death in 1891 Melville is captive in the city he associates with failure, indigence, anonymity. In the aftermath of the Civil War, when so many were seeking a new start, Melville becomes an out-of-door inspector of customs at a salary of $4.00 a day (it was later reduced to

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$3.60). At a time when bright prophetic Britishers, like Robert Buchanan, for whom the author of *Moby-Dick* was "a Titan," came looking for him, astonishing important literary mediocrities of the day like E.C. Stedman, who could only report that Melville was "dwelling somewhere in New York," Melville did not even have assurance of tenure in his job. His brother-in-law John Hoadley wrote to the Secretary of the Treasury:

> . . . to ask you, if you can, to do or say something in the proper quarter to secure him permanently, or at present, the undisturbed enjoyment of his modest, hard-earned salary, as deputy inspector of the Customs in the City of New York—Herman Melville. Proud, shy, sensitively honorable—he had much to overcome, and has much to endure; but he strives earnestly so as to perform his duties as to make the slightest censure, reprimand, or even reminder,—impossible from any superior. Surrounded by low venality, he puts it all quietly aside, quietly declining offers of money for special services—quietly returning money which has been thrust into his pockets behind his back, avoiding offence alike to the corrupting merchants and their clerks and runners, who think that all men can be bought, and to the corrupt swarms who shamelessly seek their price; quietly, steadfastly doing his duty, and happy in retaining his own self-respect.

During the Gilded Age, the Brownstone Decades, the Iron Age that made New York (until our day) the supreme capital—of money, moneymaking, of the power panorama in architecture, art, publishing, the cosmopolitan intellectualism fused by mass immigration—Melville in his evenings, "nerve-shredded with fatigue" as his wife said, worked at the poetry that she was afraid to tell the family he was writing—"you know how such news get around." *Battle-Pieces*, his poems on the Civil War impelled, he said, by the fall of Richmond, had already been above the battle, just as in "The House-Top," the most personal poem in the collection, he was on his rooftop scorning the New York mob whose insurrection against the Draft Act he heard as:

> . . . a mixed surf
> Of muffled sound, the Atheist roar of riot.
> Yonder, where parching Sirius set in drought,
> Balefully glares red Arson—there—and there.
> The Town is taken by its rats—ship-rats
> And rats of the wharves. All civil charms
> And priestly spells which late held hearts in awe—
> Fear-bound, subjected to a better sway
> Than sway of self; *These like a dream dissolve,*
> *And man rebounds whole aeons back in nature.*

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Now, in *Clarel,* he was in the Holy Land; in *Timoleon,* in the Villa Albani—removed from the city that just a century ago Edith Wharton remembered with a shudder as row on row of brownstones put up by venal landlords in the 1860s. "Out of doors, in the mean, monotonous streets, without architecture, without great churches or palaces, or any visible memorials of an historic past . . . cursed with its universal chocolate-covered coating of the most hideous stone ever quarried, this cramped horizontal gridiron of a town without towers, porticoes, fountains or perspectives, hide-bound in its deadly uniformity of mean ugliness. . . ."

Melville, who was to spend many Sundays with his granddaughter Eleanor in the newly opened Central Park, had nothing to say about the urban scene in this first great public park in the New World, nothing about the thousands pouring every year into New York harbor. Henry Adams in the *Education* at least did the huddled masses seeking to breathe free the courtesy of attacking them. Melville, writing in his poetry of the Pyramids, of tormented Confederate veterans in Jerusalem, of the Age of Antoninus, of conflict with his own androgyny, had nothing to say of the rapacity of finance capitalism in the age of Jay Gould and Jim Fiske—nothing of the crime and squalor of the lower New York streets so conveniently adjacent to police headquarters. Jacob Riis, taking his extraordinary photographs of destitution for *How the Other Half Lives,* used to obtain his flash in the dark rooms by firing a pistol; this often set off a fire, but a cop laughed that dust was so thick on the walls that it smothered the fire.

If there is nothing in Melville "dwelling somewhere in New York" of the world that Stephen Crane was soon to describe in *Maggie* and in his sketches of the Bowery and the Tenderloin district, material that enraged the police forever shaking down prostitutes and practically excluded Crane from New York, neither is there anything of Whitman's feeling for the people, the streets, the sheer life-giving vitality that made Whitman describe *Leaves of Grass* and his city as counterparts. "I can hardly tell why, but feel very positively that if anything can justify my revolutionary attempts & utterances, it is such *ensemble*—like a great city to modern civilization & a whole combined clustering paradoxical unity, a man, a woman."

The port, the greatest harbor as it used to be thought of, was to stupefy and alarm Henry Adams at the end of the old century and Henry James at the beginning of the next. But Melville the "isolato," his word, reminds us in his New York secretiveness of so many poets, artists, and visionaries who in New York found perfect solitude even if they were afraid of dying in it—a creative race that tolerated New York,

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even loved it from the distance of Washington Heights, Brooklyn, Queens. Like Ishmael clinging for life to the coffin that Queequeg had lovingly cut designs into showing the gods and the whole cycle of life, they had more freedom than they ever could in a small town. Freedom to write, to love as you please, freedom to write of your own Spoon River, Winesburg, Asheville, without your neighbors looking into your pots.

But is Melville the last of these New York hermits—after Albert Pinkham Ryder, Edwin Arlington Robinson, O. Henry, Louise Bogan, Joseph Cornell? Can a writer or painter now get away from the radio and television next door, the tenants' association, the investigator, the drug pushers, the muggers? Immigrant New York, ethnic New York, making a living from the streets, living in the streets, making it, living the dream of making it—faster, faster!—forced its children out into the open, made them seek every public arena in the city, turned the city itself into their chief image of love and frustration, the city as *the* great preoccupation of American thought. From the same period of Melville's retreat into New York, the late sixties, we get the conjunction of New York with creativity *about* the future: in John Augustus Roeblings's Brooklyn Bridge, the incomparable center promenade overlooking New York harbor as well as in the curveship that Hart Crane from Ohio described as lending a myth to God:

> O harp and altar, of the fury fused
> (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)
> Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
> Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry

The best things written about the American city as a stupendous new fact were written usually by Midwesterners who caught the new sense of scale involved just in moving to a city—Dreiser, Anderson, Cather, Lindsay, Sandburg, Fitzgerald, Lewis, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Bellow. Much of modern American writing was conceived in the outsider's dream of the big city, by those relatively new to it—and much of America was still new to it up to 1945. Only those amazed by the commonplace, like Dreiser, could uncover the clash of interests, the vital struggles below the surface, the shock and clamor of the unexpected, the savagery that is so rooted in temptation and so precious to temptation.

This is where American writing came of age, if you like; or ceased to find the New World new. What vanished openly, with New York as the theater and great arena of modern corporate life and mass life, had

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subtly vanished long before—the totally independent sense of divinity that Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman knew as essential to their own quest for personality—that bitter Melville never ceased to look for—that Dickinson in far-off Amherst handled as traditional imagery rather than as an article of belief. The problem of the nineteenth century *was* the death of God, precisely because, as Marx said, man cannot deal with his conviction of immortality so long as he is brutalized by the struggle for existence. The modern world is not so much political as ideological; the new wars of religion, left wing and right wing, betray their fanaticism by proving interminable.

But this is getting ahead of our story: the onset was physical in every sense, starting with the freedom of the body. Eros, as Auden wrote in New York, is the builder of cities. Dreiser's Carrie, Crane's Maggie, even James's New York heroine Milly Teale in *The Wings of the Dove*, along with his other two spacious and astonishing novels from London in the earliest 1900s, *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*, turn on the long-buried sexuality that only Whitman the commoner had the wit to celebrate in himself because sex was so wickedly and beautifully alive in New York. The connection between sex and the physicality of New York was equally clear to Gertrude Stein after her first affair with a woman—the very look of New York conveyed to her a message about purity; it corresponded to her new, cleansed state of mind. "I simply rejoiced in the New York streets, in the long spindling legs of the elevated, in the straight high undecorated houses, in the empty upper air and in the white surface of the snow. It was such a joy to realize that the whole thing was without mystery and without complexity, that it was clean and straight and meagre and hard and white and high."

Yehudi Menuhin said in 1943 that one of the great war aims was to get to New York. This became a great rush just before and after what Dos Passos called "Mr. Wilson's War," when many native sons stopping in New York on their way to Paris came to love New York. To this day Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald of St. Paul remains the dramatic poet of New York's luxurious upper-class landmarks, like the Plaza Hotel. New York was a dreamland to Fitzgerald, as it was to his acolyte John O'Hara from Pottsville, Pennsylvania. But O'Hara's mind was too ordinary, a mirror of his own brutal characters, to duplicate Fitzgerald's delicate and tragic triumph. O'Hara loved and aped the privilege that lies in large amounts of cash, the chance to sit with the racing set and to name their horses. To Fitzgerald upper-class New York represented the imagination of whatever is charming, touched by the glamour of money, romantically tender and gay.

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No writer born to New York's constant pressure can ever associate so much beauty with it—can ever think of New York as the Plaza Hotel. Fitzgerald felt about New York that it was a woman too exciting to be trusted. New York was the pleasure capital—and thus, to the active American conscience, unreal, a mirage, surely treacherous. At the end of *The Great Gatsby,* when the tale of Gatsby's foolish hopes has all been told, Fitzgerald suddenly, piercingly, begins a great litany over the Middle West as the source of American innocence and hope. Nick Carraway the narrator is gripped by the realization that New York—the East incarnate—has spoiled and ruined all his Midwestern friends. "That's my Middle West—not the wheat or the prairies or the lost Swede towns, but the thrilling returning trains of my youth, and the street lamps and sleigh bells in the frosty dark and the shadows of holly wreaths thrown by lighted windows on the snow."

Of course Fitzgerald never wrote about St. Paul as *much,* or as brilliantly, as he did about New York. He had the feeling for the textures and lights of the great metropolitan glitter that the enraptured guest gets—or used to get?—at the great New York feast. He wrote of "the enchanted metropolitan twilight," of "forms leaning together in taxis," of New York on summer afternoons as "overripe, as if all sorts of funny fruits were going to fall into your hands," of Negroes "in cream-colored limousines being driven by white chauffeurs across Queensboro Bridge." For Fitzgerald all paradoxes then were spectacles. The name of the American dream was still New York.

Fitzgerald's dream was not shared by the writer who admired him so much that he was killed at thirty-seven rushing to Fitzgerald's funeral—Nathan Wallenstein Weinstein—who became Nathaniel West. Those immigrants of a century or so ago might see America as promises, but certainly not as beauty. When their descendants became the authors of *Miss Lonelyhearts, Jews Without Money, Call It Sleep, Awake and Sing, Franny and Zooey, Barbary Shore, An American Dream, The Victim, Seize the Day, The Assistant, The Little Disturbances of Man,* books with which one must associate such testaments of hard American experience by the descendants of slaves as *Native Son, Notes of a Native Son, Invisible Man,* no one could miss a grimness behind certain lives projected on the imperial city. This gave release to a few, all too few, new imaginations. Despite the masses of Jews, Italians, Blacks and Hispanics who have found opportunity in the big cities if nothing else—and often not even that—it is chilling to remember how few *lasting* works have come out of their lives, have done justice to the mass experience in the big city.

Fitzgerald wrote proudly of "the stamp that goes into my books so

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that people can read it blind, like braille." It is possible, in the current reign of conceptualism and ideological rage, that literature itself is out of date. In the best universities criticism has been replaced by literary theory, which is convenient when you consider how little students read for pleasure. In lesser places it has been replaced by sawdust for the intellect like black studies, women's studies, and that chain of fraudulent liberations that clanks its way through every convention of the Modern Language Association: the novel of androgyny in New South Wales. It is hard for the children of oppression to think of art as engaging faculties subtler than anger. Black writing often seems drowned in the urgency of struggle, and since there is little interest outside the once liberal community, which now is evaporating, it is not surprising that most black authors have never published a second book.

It is hard to be a Jew, said Sholem Aleichem; it is peculiarly hard to be a Jewish writer. The enemies of the Jewish writer are predominant in his own household, demanding to know why Isaac Bashevis Singer writes about sex, Norman Mailer about violence, Saul Bellow about himself. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that Jews from Eastern Europe, which used to mean orthodoxy, felt free to flout the commandment against engraving images. Though there seem to be legions of Jewish novelists today, the so-called Jewish novel, the novel of emancipation from the commandments, the bourgeoisification of the immigrants' children, is visibly over. The real subject that haunts the Jew cannot be treated in literature, for a civilization capable of accepting the murder of a million Jewish children is still the only civilization we know.

The creative element ungraspable by criticism, the element that makes for independent beauty, for the touch of life in itself, the psychic moment, the particular scene that brings the wonder of our existence home to us—that is not easy to find in the literature of an always beleaguered people, precarious, isolated and unloved. What the Israeli novelist Amos Oz complains of is true for more than Jews—"I'm not terribly happy with the Jewish-American novelists. . . . Too wise, their characters always exchange punchlines instead of talking to each other, their books are just clever sociology. They don't have the echo of the universe, you don't see the stars in their writing."

One reason for this weakness among black writers is the exaggeration of powerlessness, the discursiveness that as in the case of so talented but floundering a writer as James Baldwin shows itself in the projection of sexual tangles onto a political cause—the latest cause year

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after year. Baldwin doesn't seem to have recovered from the onslaught against him by black nationalists. Political anger is hardly his natural turf, and of course he has never had an audience in the black community anyway. But novel by novel Baldwin, who is actually an expatriate and a very elegant writer, writes novels of an unforgettable family situation that afford him no catharsis that seem to get bigger and windier with each reiteration of the fraternal tangle.

His old sidekick and rival Norman Mailer *is* a political imagination. Whatever may be said of Mailer's career as a whole—I admire him because he really gives and destroys with himself each hallucinating subject—it is a fact that while fascinated with outlaws, murderers, criminals, people broken on the wheel of American disorder, he knows that his characters are *not* powerless and spiritually indigent. They are alive and fighting. It revolts me to sit in a New York subway car mucked up from floor through seats to ceiling with graffiti so thick on the windows already crusted with dirt that you cannot see where to get out. But only Mailer had the solidarity with the unknown vandals working through the night in the subway barns to imagine what they felt, what they wanted, what in their secret writing they are dreaming.

What Mailer recognizes, especially in the context of destructive and ferocious New York, is that Americans are drunk on a sense of power, induced by good money and the wars that bring in the good money and the cars they drive without listening to the drivel on the radio. The good life is their idea of freedom. Mailer, secretly obsessed with the ancestral idea of God as the only lasting power, has made this duplicitous American freedom the obsessive theme of his work. It is the labyrinth of his own guilt as a moralist in this profane world; pent-up maddened New York is the symbol. He has not been afraid to look ridiculous, reeling like a possessed man from one dispossession to another, from subject to subject, book to book. The excessiveness, the unreality, the violence and the *Dreck* that weigh on my battered sensibility in the big city—Mailer has made these his preoccupation, has turned himself into an urban laboratory. I admire and envy his recklessness. These days it may indeed be necessary to plunge into a book as into a jungle, not knowing what you will meet—or whether you will come out at all.

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Dennis H. Wrong

THE RISE AND FALL (?) OF NEOCONSERVATISM

The term "neoconservative" is a very recent journalistic invention. Whatever its merits or demerits, there is no question that it denotes an identifiable group of political intellectuals controlling several influential journals and well-connected with certain publishing houses, foundations, and a few professional politicians. When some of its members protest the label, the ancient rejoinder, "if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen," inevitably springs to one's lips. Yet, if one is aware of the origins of most of the leading neoconservatives in the special New York City milieu of postthirties radicalism and high-brow sensibility epitomized by *Partisan Review*, one automatically winces at the glib stereotyping of the media and is moved to insist on the individualities of the different members of the group, especially if one has known and often respected, even admired, some of them for decades. Bell is not Kristol is not Glazer is not Podhoretz is certainly not Moynihan and so on.

But these very names, linked together in so many common enterprises, rekindle the awareness of a collective identity. One then reflects that when a group of intellectuals becomes widely recognized as a coherent circle, it is almost always a sign that their disintegration is imminent, that Hegel's Owl of Minerva has spread her wings, that their historical moment has passed, and their message been banalized and absorbed into the routine discourse of politics and journalism.

One must challenge therefore the hyperbole of the subtitle of Peter Steinfels's thoughtful study of the neoconservatives: *The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics.** It seems far more probable that American politics will change the men rather than the other way around and that Steinfels's book will prove to be their epitaph as a distinct group rather than, as he hopes, the beginnings of a new, high level debate on

*Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who are Changing America's Politics* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1979).

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the issues dividing American liberals and the Left from a revitalized conservatism. A few of the neoconservatives will—indeed, already have—become spokesmen for the Republican party and the business world; they certainly represent progress beyond the clichés about the "American Way of Life" and "free enterprise" to which these groups were addicted in the past, but not much more than that. After all, such disparate figures as William Buckley and Milton Friedman have already raised the intellectual and rhetorical level of conservative argument since the 1950s, although they are presumably plain conservatives whom no one would wish to adorn with the "neo" prefix.

Others identified as neoconservatives, including Senator Moynihan, whose vagaries and vanities are coolly noted by Steinfels, fit Michael Walzer's description as "nervous liberals," a much more accurate label over the long haul, I think, than "neoconservative." The New Left and the counterculture of the sixties were what made them nervous, but the nervousness is becoming a mere tic as that decade fades into memory and we enter one in which the prospects of the Left, any Left, look fairly unpropitious and far more complex difficulties than the Vietnam War loom abroad. It was, as a matter of fact, in a somewhat similar period, the late fifties and early sixties, that the leading neoconservatives earned their "neo" by becoming active liberal reformers, several of them actually serving in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. When the radical *Schwärmerei* of the late sixties broke upon us, they reverted to an earlier posture rooted in the anti-Stalinism that had been their youthful heritage. Most members of the generation of intellectuals whose earliest political involvements were with the anti-Stalinist Left did not, of course, become neoconservatives in the seventies. (Nor, to be sure, do all neoconservatives share this particular ideological history.) It is noteworthy however that no member of that generation was prominent in the revival of radicalism after 1965, although quite a few older men and women did, at least temporarily, experience a rebirth of their youthful political hopes and expectations. But for those of us who came out of the forties rather than the thirties, Stalinism was from the very beginning the worm in the apple, the skeleton in the closet, the blot on the escutcheon, rendering us temperamentally incapable of the ardors and excesses that gave rise to neoconservatism as a reaction against them.

The timebound nature of neoconservatism is revealed by the uses made of a reported conversation between William Phillips and Kenneth Tynan in the early sixties that has now acquired almost legendary status. Phillips replied to Tynan, an early New Leftist fired with enthusiasm for the Cuban Revolution, "your arguments are so old that

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I can't remember the answers to them." Norman Podhoretz cited this exchange in *Making It*, and Nathan Glazer borrowed it for the title of his collection of essays on the campus revolts, *Remembering the Answers*, although both of them missed the self-mocking, ironical note in Phillips's remark. I recall running into Glazer at the time and saying to him, "look, it's not so much that people forgot the answers as that you guys never thought the questions were going to be brought up again!" Glazer, always one of the most reasonable of men, allowed that there was considerable truth in that. Now that sixties radicalism has been dead for a decade, the repeated harping on the old answers by neoconservatives has become tiresomely catechistic and one can be sure that the questions will still be coming up when all that was new about the New Left and "neo" about neoconservatism have long been forgotten.

The questions keep coming up not only because America, like all other societies, is far from perfect and therefore bound to produce dissenters, but because the United States is specifically committed in the very Constitution that established it to the secular ideals of liberty and equality as well as to a democratic form of government that insures continual efforts to move us further toward the realization of these ideals. Democracy, in effect, institutionalizes the general aspirations of the Left. It is sometimes necessary to insist on the corruption of particular versions of these aspirations and to stress, as the neoconservatives do, the need for an awareness of "limits" and the dangers of "utopian greed," but in America such an emphasis can only be a partial, even a reactive, one rather than the basis for a comprehensive political philosophy. This constitutes what Marxists would call a "contradiction" in the very idea of an American conservatism, as profound a one as that implied by the support some neoconservatives give to such restless, uprooting, world-transforming agencies as capitalism and the market.

Nor can an "end of ideology" ever be achieved in a democratic polity this side of utopia, because, as Franz Neumann once put it, "the democratic process compels each social group to strive for mass support [and] to present its egoistic interests as universal." But, as Neumann went on to contend, ideologies are not therefore mere fig leaves hiding the nakedness of selfish group interests, for the very requirement that they be stated in universalistic terms wins them new adherents with the result that their appeal transcends its original source. The neoconservatives are guilty of lapsing into the practice of their Marxist adversaries when they reiterate interminably that de-

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mands for greater equality and participation are no more than expressions of the interests of a "new class" of professional and public sector intellectuals.

Yet when partisans of the Left denounce even their most moderate critics as "enemies of the people," "spokesmen for dead and dying classes," "roadblocks along the march of History," neoconservatives are right to detect a totalitarian potential in such rhetoric—and this was, of course, the fear that led to their coalescence as a group in the ominous and feverish climate of the late sixties. For if democracy legitimates the aspirations of the Left, it also legitimates resistance to them. The role played by a conservative under democracy should be that described in a little-known book by R.G. Collingwood of serving as "a 'brake' on the vehicle of progress," not because he wants "to stop the vehicle but to slow it down when it seemed likely to go too fast."

One of the chief merits of Steinfels's book is that he clearly acknowledges the legitimacy and even desirability of this role, although it does not represent his own political choice. He notes that some of his subjects have played or aspired to play it, notably Daniel Bell among those whose views he examines in detail. Others, however, have succumbed to the very spirit they attack. Steinfels goes to the heart of the matter in the only one of his conclusions about the neoconservatives that he chooses to italicize: "*The most debilitating weakness of neoconservatism is its lack of respect for its political opponents.* In this it resembles, not surprisingly, the New Left against which it first mobilized—the old tale of enemies mirroring one another. . . . It is here that neoconservatism, as a serious strand of political thinking, is most in danger of undoing itself." He goes on to locate this weakness in its most pronounced form in the pages of *Commentary*.

But if the questions of equality, social justice, and democratic participation are going to continue to be raised, there is no reason to suppose that there will be any repetition of the explosive conjuncture of a dalliance with romantic revolutionism by elite segments of a suddenly enlarged student population, a destructive outburst of rage by blacks trapped in urban ghettoes, and a spreading middle-class protest against a remote and brutal war justified by arguments that seemed to have more to do with upholding a narrow view of the nation's reputation in the world than with any more tangible interest. Styles and intensities of protest change quickly, but what of the actual substance of policy making, of detailed programs, enactable reforms? When Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell founded *The Public Interest* in 1965 in order to provide a forum in which the expertise of academic

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social science could be brought to bear upon federal social and economic policy, they were attempting to meet an intellectual need that was widely acknowledged beyond the ranks of those who later became neoconservatives. I well remember an abortive effort made at about the same time to create nothing less than an American counterpart of the original Fabian Society, an effort which enlisted the support of editors and leading writers from all of the journals that a few years later were bitterly attacking one another. An elegiac, Burkean tone was occasionally evident in the early *The Public Interest,* a sign no doubt of the presence of Kristol, and the reliance on practical, heavily empirical analyses from experts was congruent with the "end of ideology" conception associated with Bell. But the journal truly reflected a common, actively reformist mood among liberal intellectuals and academics.

It was only with the waxing of the new radicalism in the late sixties that *The Public Interest* became widely denounced as the voice of a soulless, "technocratic" elitism. Since then, the neoconservative themes of the "limits of social policy," the ravages of egalitarian ideology, and the gathering "twilight of authority" have become more prominent in its pages and its detailed explorations of particular problems have increasingly debunked liberal-left preferences for such measures as busing and affirmative action to promote racial integration, broader judicial definitions of civil liberties, mass transit to combat urban deterioration, and the like. Much of this is presented as a response to the supposed failures of the Johnson administration's social programs, but, as Steinfels points out, the failures were not as total or obvious as they are often asserted to have been and a number of analysts, even in *The Public Interest* itself, have found many of them to have been modestly successful while deploring the inflated claims made for them, chiefly by President Johnson himself. Essentially, it was not the alleged failure of the Great Society but intense dislike for the militant protest movements that animated the turn to conservatism in the seventies. (As one who shared that dislike and expressed it in *Commentary,* I am less than overjoyed to find my words of ten years ago quoted by Steinfels as examples of neoconservative sentiments, when they were written long before that term had been invented, and I ceased to write for *Commentary* after 1970, having no disposition to make a *Weltanschauung* out of flogging an expiring nag.)

The erstwhile liberal reformers who became neoconservatives in the seventies were on the right track in their earlier incarnation. The United States is both a thoroughly untraditional and a profoundly

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unrevolutionary society. Specific proposals addressed to enduring social problems, proposals supported by ample data and technical knowledge, remain the kind of politics of the Left most likely to prove successful, as the experience of the New Deal suggests. It was a mistake, however, to see such an approach as "the triumph of anti-ideology," to believe that democratic politics could ever be sanitized of ideals and passionate protest or that poverty and inequality could be conquered by purely technical measures administered by experts, as maintained by President Kennedy in his 1962 Yale speech, nowadays recalled only to be derided. Political mobilization and the "professionalization of reform" (Moynihan) are not mutually exclusive alternatives: as the general in the *New Yorker* cartoon grumbled on spying a "make love not war" poster, "I don't see why we can't do both."

In any case, extreme disenchantment with American society was not the result of dormant revolutionary passions aroused by the excessive optimism of liberal reformers but rather a response to mostly unrelated events: the war, the assassinations, the brief period of ghetto rioting, the unlovable, abrasive characters of two successive "accidental" presidents Paradoxically, as Steinfels reminds us, several of the very policies that have become the special *bête noires* of neoconservatives were first advanced by men who are today counted in their ranks. Moynihan and Glazer both developed the argument that the traditional liberal goal of equality of opportunity for blacks and racial minorities needed to be supplemented by a concern for equality of results or outcomes. Bell defended temporary "reverse discrimination" in favor of blacks. Bureaucratic stupidity and rigidity undoubtedly influenced the application of these policies and some measures intended to implement them proved ill-conceived at the very least, such as busing and strict numerical quotas in educational admissions. In addition, as anyone attending an academic social science convention in recent years knows, the most questionable measures have often been treated as sacred cows by small bands of leftover sixties radicals ready to howl down as "racist" work casting doubt on their effectiveness by careful researchers like James Coleman and Christopher Jencks. Yet the original case for affirmative action is persuasively restated by Steinfels, although he concedes the validity of criticisms directed at particular programs.

The present moment, however, looks singularly unpromising for *any* politics of the Left, more unpromising than the early fifties in the absence even of a cryptofascist threat like McCarthyism to keep alive a spirit of defensive protest. Not that there is no mood of crisis, but the

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conditions sustaining it—stagflation, energy shortages, renewed Soviet aggressiveness—are scarcely those to which the traditional proposals and preferences of the Left seem obviously relevant. There has rarely been a time when a realignment of American politics along a class-based left/right axis looked less imminent. If the climate is unfavorable for moderate reforms expanding the welfare state, it is even less hospitable to radicals wistfully trying to revive the spirit of the sixties by mindlessly marching against just about anything, one year the oil companies, the next year nuclear power, until the possibility of a renewal of the draft provides a new target of protest. The prevailing conservative mood, more troubled than complacent, will probably hasten the defection from neoconservatism of the nervous liberals currently in its ranks. This center—if that's what it is—won't hold for long and some of its most distinguished supporters will find their way back at least to the moderate Left.

Others, a larger number no doubt, will move in the opposite direction. Steinfels concludes in his final paragraph that, after beginning as "an antibody on the left," neoconservatism "is now an independent force." As its positions have hardened into doctrine, it has attracted young adherents free of the ambivalence toward liberalism that marked most of its founders and tempered and subtilized their more embattled rhetoric, as well as older publicists with unsullied conservative credentials (not to speak of corporate money). Already neoconservatism as a recognizable beast seems to be disappearing, the "neo" fading last of all like the smile on the face of the Cheshire cat. Several contributors to a recent *Commentary* symposium on liberalism deplored in tones no different from those of Hayek or Friedman the degeneration of liberalism when it became tainted with "collectivism" without so much as mentioning the New Deal and the welfare state, although acceptance of these was supposed to be the dividing line between the new and the unreconstructed versions of American conservatism (really, laissez faire liberalism).

In the same vein, Steinfels can be credited with that rare achievement: a prediction confirmed in exact detail. Noting the extravagant praise bestowed by a *Commentary* reviewer on the political satire of Tom Wolfe, the "erstwhile laureate of sixties excess and the 'new sensibility,'" he remarks that "without the moat of his current politics, Wolfe would be an undefended city" in neoconservative circles. Lo and behold, the reviewer in *Commentary* of Wolfe's recent book on the astronauts reports his mocking of the square, God-fearing, clean-living, patriotic image they cultivated and decides that Wolfe is

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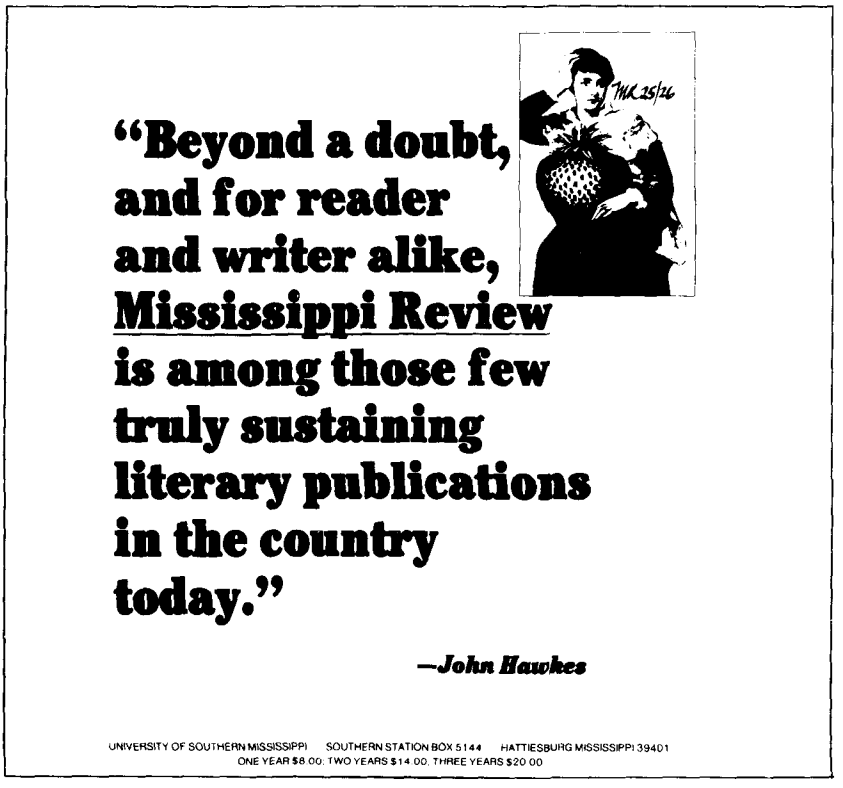
sneering at them because they are "soldiers in the cold war," asserting that this explains why his book "has received high praise from people not ordinarily noted for their love of things American." The reviewer's animus is scarcely distinguishable from that of past politicians and publicists who treated intellectuals as supercilious, heretical scoffers deficient in "Americanism." Where are the rationality and high seriousness, supposedly typical of neoconservatism, in judgments such as this?

A few years ago a visiting lecturer gave a seminar talk on "neo-Marxism and postindustrial society." In the question period, a young woman rather plaintively asked him why he had failed even to mention two Marxist writers who were evidently special heroes of hers. "Not very 'neo,' those fellows," he retorted. She might have replied that industrial society wasn't all that "post" either, but the lecturer's quip can be applied with equal justice to the evolution of neoconservatism as a political and intellectual movement.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Jan Kavan

CZECH LETTER

To celebrate the thirty-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army, the president of Czechoslovakia, Dr. Gustáv Husák, announced an amnesty, because, as he declared, "the consolidation of political and moral unity of the people provides the guarantee that certain persons who have violated the law can be reformed even without being sentenced and without serving a prison term." However this "guarantee" looks quite shaky when confronted with the actual text of the amnesty. It applies only to people with suspended sentences and to those sentenced to less than twelve months imprisonment, provided that they are first offenders. It specifically excludes those sentenced for leaving or attempting to leave Czechoslovakia without permission. This, in fact, means that of those imprisoned for so-called crimes against the republic—the label for political prisoners—at best only a handful will be released.

This will be a bitter disappointment for many Czechs and Slovaks who argue that twelve years after the Soviet invasion the time is more than ripe for a genuine gesture from the government toward its political opponents. Their wishful thinking was encouraged by a comparison with János Kádár's Hungary where a form of reconciliation was apparent only six years after the 1956 events, and also by the strength of international protests against last year's Prague trial of six members of the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS), including prominent playwright Václav Havel, who were sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment. An amnesty, it was argued, could provide a face-saving device and rid the regime of a case which serves as a focus of attention and exposes the government's lack of "consolidation" and fear of criticism by human rights activists.

However, it now seems that those who believed that the government was not strong enough to afford a genuine amnesty have been proven right.

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Havel and others are allowed to write letters only to their nearest relatives and these letters are carefully censored. Some of them have now been made available by the Palach Press Agency. In one of his first letters, written after he was transferred together with his friends Václav Benda and Jiří Dienstbier to the prison camp Heřmanice, in northern Moravia, following the Supreme Court's rejection of their appeal, Havel reminds his wife of the existence of the censor:

> As I was told by my "educator," I am allowed to write to you that I am working in the Vítkovice steel works but I am not allowed to tell you anything else about it, except perhaps that I don't need to lift heavy things which I would be unable to carry anyway. But despite this, I have severe worries about whether I will be able to fulfill my quota. . . . I am still not able to imagine how I will be able to survive five years of this life. . . . On the other hand, I have to tell you, and perhaps I am allowed to, that although, understandably, there are all sorts of people here, they are treating us well and trying to help us. . . . I was surprised and touched by the way we were welcomed. . . .

Havel is not allowed to describe his thoughts on general subjects, nor may he use foreign words, quotations, symbols which the prison censor may not understand, or allegories. Letters which do not meet these criteria are simply confiscated. Those which do arrive frequently have sections crossed out. Havel the playwright is punished by not being allowed to write anything else besides the restricted letters:

> There is no way I can think in terms of any real existential or literary questions. Any attempts in this direction seem to me, in confrontation with this experience, futile or, more correctly, premature. First of all, I need to digest, to live through, and to understand all this. I would love to write a diary but that's not possible. . . .

Havel couldn't explain why it is not possible. Article 19 of the prison regulations explicitly specifies that the prisoner shall be "permitted to keep books, writing material, newspapers, legal regulations, photographs of members of his family. . . ." This regulation is even more clearly violated in the case of Petr Uhl who is serving his five-year sentence in a prison camp in Mírov:

> It is strange that they have confiscated my copy of the prison regulations. . . . I've seen the television news once, but I still cannot borrow any books. I am not allowed to keep any family photographs, let alone to have an English textbook or any other publications. . . .

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Uhl's conditions are harsher than those of the others because he has already served a four-year sentence imposed on him in 1970 for being a leader of the underground Revolutionary Socialist Party. He can be visited only by his wife and a brother-in-law and only twice a year for one hour. They can bring him only one parcel, weighing no more than two kilograms.

The only woman, and the oldest, among the VONS members sent to jail, fifty-two year old journalist Otka Bednářová, remains cheerful and optimistic despite her bad health. She has gallbladder problems, and during her last visit she mentioned swelling of her legs and painful swelling of the lymphatic glands:

> I don't cling to anything, I don't build on anything, I regard nothing as definitive; in this way I can live more easily, and I feel invulnerable. I am very calm and I find nothing very difficult; in fact, I am trying to help others to get into a better mood when they need it. I am also calm because of you and all our good friends, because I know that you are all thinking of me. I feel your participation even across this distance and therefore I feel undefeatable. . . . As you know, it is quite complicated for me. After all, I had an invalid pension and did only administrative work. Now I have to wear glasses the whole day, although I am not doing very detailed work. There isn't much light. In short, without glasses I can't see closeup. That's why I don't read in my free time, and maybe it's good that I have not been given my English textbook yet. I don't do anything which might strain my eyes. . . . As you know, I am incapable of slipshod work. I therefore think that, if my health allows, I shall not have any problems, but this I shall see later. At the moment, I must admit that I am extremely tired, but nothing can be done about it. . . . I do not have anything here with which to make even a cup of tea, so I don't know what will happen to my gallbladder. It longs for liquid but at the moment I don't even have anything to boil or cook, so there's no point in trying to find something to boil it on.*

Ill health seems to be common to many political prisoners. Dr. Jaroslav Šabata, Charter 77 spokesman, and Petr Uhl's father-in-law, already has had two heart attacks and has a tumor on the pancreas. By December 1980, when he is due to be released, he will have served a total of seven and a half years for his political activities in the seventies and he is now imprisoned in an isolation cell at Litoměřice prison. Rules are very strict, and for a time he had to share a cell with a

*Otka Bednářová is in a prison in Opava, and her family believes that she operates a sewing machine.

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psychopath. He is not allowed to select books of his choice from the prison library, but is simply given one book each week. He received one magazine but only in Russian and not the English version he asked for. His letters are censored so strictly that his relatives have no idea what work he is doing and under what conditions.

Conditions of work is one of the main topics of a recent Charter 77 report on Bory prison near Pilsen where there are two thousand prisoners, many of them political. The report points out that the compulsory work quota is extremely tough; for example, in 1979 only one out of fifty teams of prisoners was able to fulfill it. Since whole teams are responsible for the fulfillment of the quota, those who are unable to maintain the pace are beaten up by others, as happened to Petr Cibulka, who, as a political prisoner, receives in addition harsher punishment for nonfulfillment. While others from his work team received only five days of confinement to their cells after work, Cibulka got fifteen days of solitary confinement.

The report lists frequent injuries, mainly cuts, burns, and gas poisoning while cutting glass jewelry. Prisoners are often forced to work when injured.

The presidential amnesty announced with such pomposity will change nothing. The poor working conditions will remain, as will the solitary confinements imposed on prisoners for trivial reasons—Jiří Chmel received twenty days because he requested a visit from someone not related to him—and the inadequate medical treatment. Above all, the authorities clearly encourage a system which attempts to separate political prisoners from any genuine intellectual stimuli in the hope that before they are released they will turn into nonthinking, obedient creatures bent on sheer survival. Only docile people can be effectively governed by the present Czech government, and those brought to power by Soviet tanks are plainly aware of this.

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FICTION

Jerry Bumpus

THE HAPPY CONVENT

In the library Lutz found a basket containing an apple and a jar of beans. Downstairs, the kitchen was deserted, but late that afternoon he saw old Ockersly polishing the mirror at the far end of the hall. When he saw Lutz in the mirror he turned and slipped away. The next day Lutz had peaches, the gift of a figure in bronze, a naked running boy who, midstride, lifted the basket tied with a ribbon to his wrist at the same time he glanced over his shoulder, his mouth wide, yelling to other children left far behind. Though Lutz didn't see Ockersly that day, he felt his presence in the same subtle unsure way one senses the mood of people in a room he is about to enter, and the next morning as Lutz sat reading and eating some popcorn he found in a vacated aquarium, he looked up when he realized that the slow knocking at the back of his mind, which he had taken as part of his crunching the popcorn, was the distant steady chock of someone chopping wood behind the house. Looking out, he saw Cookie working away, the curls of his Shirley Temple wig dancing as he swung the axe.

Sometimes, usually late in the afternoon, Lutz would become suddenly certain that Ockersly was in the next room. Standing at a window, he would feel sure Ockersly was looking out the window next door. And no doubt there were peepholes everywhere in the house through which Ockersly kept an eye on what was going on. One afternoon when Lutz felt Ockersly next door playing his game, Lutz sneaked out and went downstairs. Ockersly was in for a surprise when he peeked into the library and found it empty! And when Ockersly came rushing into the kitchen with the news that Lutz had disappeared—there Lutz would sit, chatting with Cookie. But when Lutz reached the kitchen he stopped outside, for Ockersly was already there, smoking a cigarette and sipping tea, while Cookie kneaded a big

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lump of dough and told a story, upon which Lutz eavesdropped to its end, about Cookie's daughter who died twenty years ago in Liverpool while Cookie was at sea.

Lutz was jolted awake by a door slamming and distant braying laughter. There was some running and the dull thud of chairs or people knocking over. Then more laughter, and silence.

It was dusk, the window dim and the chairs and sofas three-quarters sunk into the shadows where they would hide through the night. Downstairs, the kitchen was empty. Lutz had turned to return upstairs when Cookie came around the corner wearing a swallow-tail, a lace shirt, and silk stockings, with a pair of black high-heeled shoes tucked under his arm, and twisting a silver peruke onto his head. He looked up, his face pink from a shave and bleeding brightly from two nicks on the chin. He put on his shoes, winked, and stamped through a buck and wing, leaning on Lutz's shoulder to click his heels. "Rather nifty, eh?" Then he looked Lutz up and down. "Where's your get-up, Lutz? I thought you and Ronnie Ockersly had already been up there."

"Mr. Ockersly might be up there. I heard some noise a while ago."

"So you've not met him yet."

"Met him? Yes, I've met him a dozen times."

"I mean Mr. Abbott. He came back this afternoon."

Lutz was speechless. He had almost given up hope of actually meeting Abbott.

Cookie pushed by him and began slamming wood into the stove. He scowled over his shoulder. "Well? You going to stand there forever? Go up. Innerduce yourself."

The second floor was deserted. Going up to the third floor, Lutz met Ockersly on his way down, his "get-up" a riding cap, a stained and ancient red hunting jacket, jodhpurs riddled with holes by generations of moths, and riding boots smooth over the calves but cracked at the ankles and insteps and with each step flapping open where the soles met the toes. The jacket hung open, all the buttons gone, and it was pushed back off his shoulders.

Ockersly's triangular face was flushed and bloated, his eyes bugging. He nearly walked into Lutz before he stopped, blinking with surprise, and grinning. "Lutz! Well, well!" Lutz smelled liquor on his breath; indeed, he could have smelled it a good way off. Ockersly's grin shrank and his eyes tightened. "It's bad this time," he whispered. He patted Lutz's shoulder and tisked, shaking his head. Leaning close he said, "Worse'n ever before. Very worse. Very, very, very. . . ." He gave Lutz's shoulder a squeeze—"worse"—and proceeded down the stairs.

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On the third floor Lutz went from room to room. At the end of the hall he peered around the corner into the study, larger than the others and, because it faced west, not quite as dark; night was still filling up the walls to the ceiling. It appeared as empty as the others, the shapeless sofas and chairs like a muddle of clouds waiting for the moon.

Then Lutz saw movement. An overstuffed chair waddled among the other furniture, then hunkered down again. Or was someone crawling in the dark? Then Lutz saw two dogs!

Amazing! Hershel Abbott had dogs!

They sat side by side, and in the gray suggestibility of the room they appeared quite large. Unusually large, in fact. Remarkably large! They sat motionless—and not side by side, but nose to nose.

As if on a signal they stood at the same instant, turned from each other—and one disappeared! There was only one dog, and it had been looking in a mirror!

If indeed it was a dog. For in the same moment that it swung away from the mirror and headed toward the door (and as Lutz jerked back, spun about, and ran on tiptoes, his arms out from his sides), in that instant he saw that the thing was larger than any dog he had ever seen. It was—great God!—big as a bear!

In the dark of the next room Lutz waited, his heart lunging and butting against his chest. The floor creaked and the beast glided past the door and down the hall.

In the kitchen Ockersly sat at his place, tilting, one hand clamped to the edge of the table as an anchor. Across from him Cookie was sewing buttons onto the hunting jacket. "Well?"

Lutz's mouth worked but nothing came out. Then, "There's. . . ." He didn't know how to say it. He settled for, "He's not upstairs."

Cookie slung the coat away. "Damn it all!" He jumped up and ran around the table to Ockersly. "Hey!" Cookie yelled in his face. "After him!"

Ockersly blinked largely. "Yes, yes, I hear. No need to be fanatical." He rose stiffly. "Don't worry, he shan't delude me"—and he plopped back down.

"Go!" Cookie knocked him in the side of the head, sending his riding cap flying. "Get going!" He shook him, Ockersly's head wobbling on his skinny neck.

"Stop it," Ockersly said and staggered to his feet. He swayed, leaning over the table, a look of amazement coming to his face as he

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appeared to realize he was someplace other than where he had counted on being. Cookie grabbed his arm and struggled to turn him to the door, the two of them leaning on each other as though launching into the first steps of some lugubrious dance.

"Oh." They stopped, looking Lutz's way.

But they were looking beyond Lutz. He turned.

He stood in the doorway, an unlit cigar in the corner of his mouth, his large yellow eyes unblinking. "Is this Lutz?"

"Aye, it is," Cookie said.

He turned and went down the hall and up the stairs.

Cookie dumped Ockersly. "Well?" He grabbed Lutz's arm. "Go." He propelled Lutz to the door. "Go!"

Lutz climbed the stairs, following him to the third floor and into the study. "Light the lamp." Lutz found it, lit it. Turning, Lutz saw him lying on a sofa, head raised, ears pricked, looking toward a window where the moon had appeared. He continued staring at the window, clearly avoiding Lutz as if his having to speak to a person out of costume was something of an embarrassment.

Lutz had to admit it was a most convincing dog suit, particularly the head, a perfect imitation of a cross between a German shepherd and a wolf, except for its unnatural largeness, for of course it had to accommodate the head of the fellow inside. But the mouth went beyond the merely convincing. It was downright marvelous! He would smoke his cigar through the long snout, his own lips recessed at least five inches from the end of the snout (with its shiny wet black nose!) on a plane with the eyes. And those remarkably real yellow eyes! (Contact lenses, no doubt.) And there wasn't the slightest gap between the mask and the rims of the eyes inside.

"Fix us a drink," he said, speaking out the corner of his mouth and nodding to a bar set up on a table. "Whisky." There was a bright red porridge bowl among the bottles and glasses. "No water."

When Lutz turned he nearly dropped the bowl, for Abbott had silently left the sofa, crossed the room, and stood on all fours behind him. "There"—he pointed with his snout.

With his own drink Lutz sat across the room and, listening to Abbott lapping from the bowl, stared at the back end of him, the long tail hanging down straight. It would, Lutz knew, sway when he walked; that would suggest wagging. The shanks were narrow, as they are on a real dog or wolf. How had he managed that? But no doubt the narrowness was an illusion created by the breadth of the brisket and

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shoulders which were massive and were made still wider by the bushy gray fur.

He finished and trotted across the room with amazing smoothness. What an incredible number of hours had gone into perfecting that! Effortlessly he jumped up onto the sofa and, plucking his cigar from the ashtray, said, "Give me a light."

Lutz struck a match and held it to the cigar. Lutz shook out the flame, dropped the match, and heard the soft ping as it hit the ashtray. Puffing away, Abbott stared up at him. He worked the cigar from the end of his snout to the corner of his mouth, and Lutz watched his long tongue slide along the snout, licking whisky from the fur and the leathery black and purple mottled lips.

Special Yearning had gone unnoticed—this the novel dedicated to the memory of my wife who, halfway through the manuscript, in one last hurried reading, told me in a note (cancer had taken her voice) that, except for a blunder here and there, it was my best effort yet. *Honestly!*—double-underlined. That night, as I slept on the floor in the next room, she died, the pages of the last chapter scattered among the bedcovers with indecipherable notes she had been scribbling at the end.

Finding a publisher for my book had taken some doing, but at last it saw print. Months slipped by, and no reviews of it appeared—not one. In desperation I used the name B. Arthur Lutz and, disguised by a style that did a lot of huffing and puffing, wrote a piece on Hobart Stull's *Special Yearning*. But I was too late.

The day after I mailed Lutz's essay, I received the first annual statement from my publisher. He had moved seventy-one copies of a printing of two thousand. Sixty-eight were complimentary copies he sent to reviewers, editors, writers. He had sold three.

"Your novel is good, Hobart," my publisher wrote, "strange, but good." We had known each other for years but, as was the case with most of my friends, only through our correspondence; we had never laid eyes on each other. Still, I pictured my friend—not young and not old, not large and not small, ink-stained and harried and shaggy with words—sitting on a stool in a small office crowded with copies of *Special Yearning*. "We know it's good," his letter went on, "but no one wants it. It has sunk like a rock. Now what? Do we try again? Do we wait? What do we wait for?" I never heard from him again, and my unopened letters returned rubber-stamped *No Such Person*.

But B. Arthur Lutz penned his essay before I knew my novel was out of print.

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And in the weeks following the essay's appearance, Lutz received a dozen letters from editors requesting similar pieces, but, as one put it, "on less obscure works and on writers not so backwatered as Hubert Strullek."

I instantly realized that if Lutz were successful, his essays might someday be collected into a book, and this collection might conceivably contain the piece on *Special Yearning* which might in this way not altogether perish but tag along, far back, like some distant and unillustrious relative walking through the thickets at the edge of genealogy's great wilderness.

Being Lutz took some doing. In many ways that seemed to have counted for so many years, it meant leaving myself. But it seemed necessary, or I was doing it with such fierce dedication that the only plausible explanation was that surely it was necessary. With monolithic ease Lutz burbled forth essay after essay, his dinosauric prose surfacing in every literary pond. He worked night and day, the clank of the typewriter waking me from dreams in which I was a boy named Homer Stone. After long periods of writing, Lutz researched maniacally, tearing books apart, literally, consuming the whole body of a writer's work in one sitting. He discovered he had a photographic memory! And even as he slept, pen in hand and a pad on his chest where he jotted notes without needing to wake, paragraph after paragraph flowed before him, which he sometimes read aloud, waking me to stare out the window at the stars.

Then a tragic and hopeful development: after a year of this revelry, this wordy rampage, after a year of appalling success, Lutz published a piece on Canada's most ignored poet, Hershel Abbott. The essay was profound, sweetly written, and full of loving kindness. Like a stone marker on a forgotten road, it was a tribute to hard thought and the long journey of the soul.

Lutz flooded the journals with essays on Abbott—and discovered he had made a world of enemies. There sprang up three dozen attacks on Lutz and Abbott. The *coup de grace* was a "reevaluation of Lutz's recent criticism" by an eminent fellow whose forte was flamboyant irascibility: he concluded that after a mediocre beginning, marked by a paucity of scholarship and consistently dim vision, Lutz had fizzled, sinking to the lowest of lit crit tricks: pretending to find value in flops too cowardly to admit their life work had come to nothing.

Two months after the ruin of Lutz's career, he received a letter from Hershel Abbott. He praised the essays on his work and asked Lutz to serve as his secretary. In payment he would receive room and board, and he would be free to gather material for a biographical-critical

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study. What an opportunity! For Lutz's research had disclosed that Hershel Abbott was a recluse about whom absolutely nothing was known of a personal nature. Lutz would be the first representative of the literary world to meet Canada's finest poet face to face!

He rather curtly thanked Lutz for the essays on his verse. Gazing fixedly at the excritic, he said, "I thought one of them was actually pretty good."

"Ah! Which was that?"

"I don't remember."

"Oh." Abbott smoked; Lutz sipped his wine and looked about the room. Lutz blurted out, "I say . . ." But at exactly the same instant Abbott said, "Do you know Ida O'Shey?"

Of course Lutz knew her! He knew every line she had written! Inexorably, Lutz, omnivorous behemoth, trumpeting tyrannosaurus of the wide wordy savannas of belles-lettres, lumbered into his act—the stage instantly lit by the flash of his photographic memory which made Abbott blink as it illuminated half a dozen poems by Ida O'Shey. And Lutz galumphed on to other poets, then to novelists, quoting long passages, glaring whole pages before Hershel Abbott like the great gleaming hams of a line of ponderous danseuses kicking up a cancan that could/would go on interminably.

Abbott watched from the front row and when Lutz paused to catch his breath and gulp some wine, he said, "I mean do you know her—the person."

Oh. Lutz knew Ida O'Shey but not *Ida O'Shey*. Did Abbott know her? Abbott looked away. "We've corresponded." He had Lutz bring over the whisky bottle.

Ah, the pleasures of a literary correspondence! Lutz had more wine. In fact he was knocking it back with great enthusiasm as he enumerated the writers with whom he had corresponded. What wit! What wisdom! What wonderful intimacy! Lutz couldn't resist a quote or two—a *bon mot* from so and so. A scintillant from the great Argentine such and such, *Mierdecitas enjoyadas en el rocío matinal* . . . which Lutz translated as "Jewelly turdlets in the morning dew," daring, in the flush of his excitement, to risk the inappropriateness of the quote to the occasion. And after slipping in a paragraph from Abbott's own letter which commended Lutz's efforts as critic, he blazed into a quote of one of his essays on Abbott. "Was that it?"

"Was that what?"

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"The one you said was rather good."
"Oh. No."
Another quote. "That one?"
"No."

Lutz quoted from three, four—a dozen, going faster and faster, no longer pausing to question Abbott, the words banging out so rapidly Lutz was clearly straining himself, his sweating face steaming and turning red, then maroon, his forehead bulging, his eyes glistening, until the words became one continuous endless word, the be-all and end-all word, a trillisyllabic blared at the top of his lungs.

His mouth clamped shut. The echo of words subsided like tin cans rolling down a tin hill.

Then Lutz laughed. A bursting karoomp followed by sniggers. And he did it again. "I say . . ." But he couldn't say, as more laughter bludgeoned forth. He gulped down some wine but spewed it out on another burst of laughter.

Through it all Abbott stared at him in that firm, stern way of a person, or dog, seeing all the way into another's heart, clear to the bottom of the grim little business. He let Lutz go on with it. Why not? It was clear by his look that he was satisfied that he had got Lutz, the whole works, or at least all he needed.

Lutz tried to stop laughing. He even tried some quick grief, coming out with huge egg shaped crocodile tears and some crocodile sobs, but just when he thought he had things under control out came another karoomp.

Shaking his head, shrugging, extending his hands palms up helpless and culpable, Lutz stood and tried to get out a single word of apology but couldn't for the laughter. As he backed out into the hall, still karoomping and sputtering, he expected Abbott to at last speak. But he said nothing. And as Lutz weaved down the hall, he realized he knew nothing about Hershel Abbott that he hadn't known before, unless one viewed the dog suit as something of the inner fellow . . . karoomp!

But Lutz wasn't put off by Abbott's privacy. Actually he was euphoric. For one reads an author as he insists on being read, patiently allowing all the feints, dodges, and round abouts, until one finds himself winding with increasing agility through all the author's convolutions and permutations and ultimately enjoying, quite as much as an actual face with actual eyes and lips, the disguises of sky, rock, cloud—and dog—which the author dons as he becomes his work.

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All in all Lutz loved it. No one is more willing to be tricked, or quite so keen on being led on a wander, as one devious writer reading another even more devious than himself.

The next day Lutz was waiting in the study with Ockersly, who sat in a far corner, worse the wear from yesterday and last night, moaning now and then as if crooning some old tune. Then the door swung open and Abbott entered. He glowered at Lutz and grunted a greeting as he went behind the large desk and tried to climb up into the swivel chair. It kept turning and he hopped after it on his hind feet. He succeeded in getting into the chair, but with his back to the desk. With difficulty he straightened the chair and stared at the pages piled on the desk.

Cookie pulled a serving cart to the doorway. "Oh my God," Abbott mumbled as Cookie mixed a large jar of what looked like mud jelly. He brought it in, shook it out of the jar with a sucking plop into a bowl which he set on the desk before Abbott. The poet clenched his eyes and commenced to choke it down, gagging and curling his lips back from his long teeth, whining and shivering. Cookie leaned toward me and said low, "Muciloid. For his poor gut."

Abbott lifted his head and started to turn away from the bowl. "Ah ha," Cookie said.

Abbott tried to speak but couldn't.

Cookie reached into the bowl and scooped up the large lump remaining. "Open up."

"Uh," Abbott grunted. He whined, then opened his huge mouth, and Cookie slid the last of the muciloid down his throat.

Cookie left with the bowl, shutting the door quietly behind him. Abbott tilted back the swivel chair. He drew his lips back from his fangs and gasped. "My God. You can't imagine, Lutz. You just cannot imagine."

He tilted forward and stared disconsolately at the desk. He pawed the pile of papers, knocking some off. Lutz picked them up. "What's that?" Abbott said, and peered at the pages Lutz held up. "Ah. Good. I'm glad you found that. Throw it away." Lutz laid the pages in the wastebasket. "Now this other stuff," Abbott said. "There's a bunch of letters here somewhere. . . . Been saving them for you to answer." With both paws he stirred the papers. This apparently made him dizzy. He leaned back, the chair tilting. He stared off. Then again he saw Lutz sitting there. He blinked twice and spoke low, conspiratorially. "Just a pinch, eh? Mostly water, but with just a tincture . . . ?"

Lutz poured them both one, nicely watered, and one for Ockersly. He placed Abbott's bowl amid the papers. He drank and grinned up at

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Lutz. "Marvelous, Lutz. Ain't it marvelous, Ronnie?" It was Ockersly's judgment that it was indeed marvelous; he took his with him back to his corner. "Now," Abbott said. "Those letters. They're from some weaselly sons of bitches who took inordinate and obscene pleasure in taunting me after things turned against you and your essays on my verse. . . .

"To hell with it. It doesn't matter. All the way to hell with it!" He shoved a great stack of papers off onto the floor. "Let 'em lie there, Lutz, let 'em lie. For Christ's sake don't always be picking things up. On the floor's exactly where I want anything that falls off the desk. You must understand that." Something caught his eye. Putting his forefeet onto the desk he leaned up and, squinting, read for a moment. Then he looked at Lutz. "D'ye ever know Ida O'Shey?" Lutz reminded him he knew the work but had never met the poet. "I know you keep *saying* that, Lutz, but are you *sure* you've never met her?" Lutz vowed that he had never once in his life met Ida O'Shey.

Abbott chuckled slyly. "I say, Lutz. . . ." Lutz took his bowl to the bar and freshened it. "Thankee, my boy." He drank.

Lutz brought up the subject of work. He produced a notepad and a long list of questions about Abbott's life and work.

Abbott shook his head. "Of course. There's plenty of time for your work. *After* we've finished with *my* work. Eh? Isn't that our deal?"

"Very well," Lutz said and put aside the questions.

Abbott nodded toward the typewriter on a table by the desk. "Sit down there and we'll do some verse."

Just like that! We'll do some verse!

"Well?" he said. Lutz sat down at the typewriter. "Go on, stick some paper in it." Lutz stuck some paper in it. "Now, get all this, Lutz, for I hate like hell repeating myself. Ahem:

> The cow, the old cow, she is dead;
> It sleeps well, the horned head.

His eyes were gleaming when Lutz looked over his shoulder, and he was uttering a silent wheezy heh heh heh. "Dammit, Lutz, type it. 'The cow, the old cow. . . .'"

Lutz typed it and Abbott nodded for him to put it on the desk. He glanced at it. "Hm. Three strikeovers and the capital *I* looks like it's flying off. But that's not so bad." He sat back. "How about this? 'I always knew. . . .' No, you don't need to type it. We're done with that. Let's just hear the sound of it:

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I always knew what sort of weather
We were going to have,
For Cynthia never wore her feather
When the weather would be bad.

But when the days were warm and bright
Cynthia wore a feather.
Sometimes black and sometimes white,
The color doesn't count whatever.

Ockersly, come up for another drink, said he for one admired the sound of it quite a lot. Lutz offered this:

With teats distended with their milky store,
Such numerous lowing herds, before my door,
Their painful burden to unload did meet,
That we with butter might have washed our feet.

They moved away from the desk and typewriter, and as noon slipped past Abbott had Lutz climbing bookcase ladders and reading aloud from the poets and everyone else. When Lutz got somewhat thick-tongued, Ockersly took a turn. But he was only good at Sir Thomas Browne and, though he was magnificent at that, he made all the rest sound like Browne. Abbott took a turn, but his eyes were bad and the reading gave him a monstrous headache and he had to lie down with his eyes closed. Recovering, he sat up and had Ockersly sing for them. He had just had a go at "Old Bangum" when Cookie brought in a tray of his famous little sandwiches. He stayed for a drink, and the four of them tried some barbershop. Later they went out onto the terrace and cranked up a record player. They spent some pleasant hours listening to music and playing canasta, at which Cookie proved indomitable even after he got so stewed he believed they were at sea and kept slowly leaning back and forth. Later, upon Abbott's command, Cookie, Ockersly, and Lutz donned get-ups: Cookie a Chinaman's black silk suit, cap, and pigtail; Ockersly his red riding jacket and jodhpurs; and Lutz tried on a priest's garb, with soutane. For a while Abbott wore a Little Boy Blue/Lord Fauntleroy suit which Cookie had made for him, but he had to take it off after a while because he got hot inside it and was panting loudly. The evening was expansive and very long, with scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*, more singing, and some dancing, in all of which Abbott participated with gusto. I hazily recall Father Lutz writing on a blackboard with yellow chalk, while Abbott stood back scolding him and repeating the words Lutz crookedly

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scrawled, at last completing a dozen lines or so. Then he and Abbott sat down and read them over several times and tried tearing them apart, but it was dawn and the lines were awfully good.

Abbott didn't appear later in the day, and Lutz saw nothing of Ockersly or Cookie. Lutz made himself tea and, sitting by his lamp, he found, not at all by accident, late in the night, in the utter stillness of the great empty house, the same lines in slightly different form over which Abbott and he had struggled. They were from *The Providential Species*, Abbott's first collection, published some thirty years ago.

Wearing pearls and a long gown of white satin and lace, as if out for an evening, she found herself here instead, a wide hat and veil her only concessions to the fact that she had traveled so far from civilization. She took Ockersly's arm when he got out and came around to help her from the car. With wonderful slowness she started up the steps, her back straight, her head lifted, serenely indomitable before the prospect of climbing all the way to the top. She paused, clutching her throat beneath the veil and uttering two small gasping cries. And she was indomitable before that, too, the more elaborate circumstance of a disease which she bravely attempted to disguise. Though the veil, the satin and lace perhaps weren't intended to conceal but complement. She would inveigle the pack of afflictions stalking her and make them her entourage, a claque of fairies in satin and lace, wearing pearls in their eyes—and they would grace her, magically become her special qualities!

She and Ockersly reached the top of the stairs. The veil was heavy, thicker than muslin. Could she actually see through it? She extended her hand. "At last," she said, breathless. "My dearest Hershel."

Maybe Lutz's jaw dropped, maybe he went bug-eyed. He hid his face by taking her cold thin hand and putting his lips to it. She murmured. Perhaps she wasn't speaking but gasping for breath. Lutz began, "Madam . . ."

"Please. Ida. Lovers have other formalities"—and she drew Lutz to her. He smelled smoke in the veil and in her whitish yellow hair. Ockersly turned away when Lutz glanced at him over her shoulder. "So many years," she said. She and Lutz again looked at each other, or rather Lutz stared into the veil and believed he saw the outline of her rather long face, her lips lifted in a calmly leonine smile.

"I . . ."

She waited.

"I hardly know how to say this, but . . ."

She lifted the veil.

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An extraordinary face! Not exactly beautiful. . . . But yes, beautiful in a sense, in the attenuation of an aquiline nose and thin cheeks sinking beneath sharp cheekbones. It was a beautiful face in its dignity, severity, its cold smoothness. And there was something more in the expression of her mouth, now that Lutz could see it clearly, a sharpness or irrelevance kinking her lips up at the corner. . . . Maybe something tinny left over from youth. Or a vein of craftiness. Perhaps her steady gray eyes exposed more than she realized—the glint of cunning?

Inside Lutz an idea loudly clanked. And the longer that clank echoed the more it pushed up laughter that bucked and knocked him so hard he had to squeeze shut his eyes, clench his teeth. But it twisted his face into a tight, no doubt gruesome grin, and a snort escaped. Taking it for a sob, she drew Lutz to her and patted his back. "There. There."

Lutz risked another look. . . .

And instead of kissing this "Ida O'Shey" as obviously he was supposed to at this point, he let his arm steal around her and, giving her an equivocal little squeeze which sent a flicker of uncertainty (or was it goatish glee?) across her face, Lutz drew her into the house.

He was sitting in the dark when the parlor door swung open and Abbott trotted in. "Hi ho!" Lutz called. "Where have you been all day?"

"Let's have some light."

"Of course! There must be some matches here somewhere. . . . Ah, here are Miss O'Shey's! Where she left them after smoking one of her peculiar cigarettes."

"Cut the chatter and just light the lamp."

Lutz lit it and turned. "My! You're looking rather scruffy, old fellow. Been for a stroll in the woods, I guess."

"Shut up, Lutz, and pour me a drink. And no more for yourself."

Lutz poured him a drink, sloshing out some on the carpet. Abbott waited until Lutz had sprawled on a sofa before he drank. When he finished he came and sat before Lutz. "Now, I want to know just what the hell you think you're doing."

"What?—no peck on the cheek for me after your gambol in the woods?"

Abbott came right up and, turning his head at an angle, opened the huge jaws of his dog's head. Staring at Lutz through those convincing yellow eyes, he closed the jaws on Lutz's knee.

"Now that's a bit much." Lutz reached down to push him away, but he tightened his jaws. "Stop, Abbott. Stop!"

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He opened his mouth but didn't back away. Lutz rubbed his knee. "How do you do that? I mean, do *your* jaws . . . ?"

"Shut up and listen to me."

"Oh. So we're going to be serious, are we? All right."

"First, I want you to know I saw and heard it all. I was watching when she arrived—"

"I should think you were."

"—and I was in the next room while you were in here with her. So I know everything that happened."

"Wait, Abbott. Don't you think it would be more interesting and pose more complications if you *didn't* know? If you'll let me step out of character for a moment, I think it'd be better if you had just returned from roaming in the woods and heard from Ockersly and Cookie that Ida O'Shey had arrived, and now you've come to ask me about her."

Abbott was frowning.

"Well, it's your show," Lutz said with a shrug. "But I have another question. Why did you bring her into it? I know *why* someone ought to come into it. We're at that point. But why couldn't she be a fellow? An old army chum, say. Or . . ."

"What are you talking about?"

"Why, I'm talking about the fact that Ida O'Shey is a woman. Don't you see what that does to things?"

He turned away. "I'd send you packing, but she's already met you. It's too late to bring in someone new."

"I could be Father Lutz again. Or if that would be too complicated, maybe the good father could be Episcopal this time."

"Shut up!" Silence hung as Abbott stared out a window. "I'm amazed that I could have so completely misjudged you."

"Well, yes, Abbott, you have misjudged me, I'm afraid, and in a very important way, and I want you to know I resent it. I emphatically resent being used as a dupe for your sex problem."

He turned to Lutz. "My what?"

"Let's be frank, Abbott—your sex problem. The garbs and get-ups, the whole ongoing drama is fine—really quite marvelous in its way. I admit you had drawn me into it very nearly all the way. But now obviously after all is said and done the entire business comes down to your sex problem."

He whispered, "Don't say that."

"But that's exactly what it is, don't you see? A pure and simple sex problem."

He came straight for Lutz. Lutz tried to get up, to make a dodge for

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the door, but Abbott was too quick. He had Lutz's knee again and this time he put full pressure to it, even adding some tugs and jerks.

When he let up, Lutz was half off the sofa onto the floor. "My God," Lutz gasped. With trembling hands he rolled up his trouser leg. The knee wasn't bleeding, but the teeth marks were deep and purple.

"No more you-know-what?" Abbott said.

"Right. Sincerest apologies."

"Apologies accepted. Now. Tell me, why did you act like such a perfect fool?"

"You mean . . . here in the parlor. Well, you see I thought it was, ah . . . expected of me. I thought it would be just right. In the mood of things. Larky, so to speak."

And it had been quite larky. The new Lutz at his best. He had led "Ida O'Shey" into the parlor, parked her at a sofa, got a drink for her and one for himself, lit one of her lumpy cigarettes, and launched into a scene which as he recalled it delighted him and made him blush furiously. Tilting Ida O'Shey on the sofa and springing on her, Lutz had scuffled and grunted and dished out feverish epithets of ardor. Ida O'Shey resisted with dignity, not dropping the conversation. She was telling about the endless train ride north and her fellow passengers, cowboys and Indians and two or three women whose photos she vaguely recalled having seen on the dust jackets of books—while she pushed away Lutz's numerous hands, abruptly turning her head as his kisses worked their way up her arm and over her shoulder, and all the while wheezing very authentically and barking rapid coughs that only once or twice came out squawky and unconvincing.

They paused to catch their breath. "When's your next book coming out?" Lutz asked.

"February," she wheezed.

"Who's doing it?"

"Fondoy and Epperson."

"Another drink?"

"Please."

He lit another fat cigarette for her, let her take a puff, then leaped on her.

Throughout all this there remained that glint in the "lady's" eye which Lutz had earlier taken for cunning. I was wondering if he had misinterpreted it, for now it seemed less glint than gleam. Lutz hardly noticed it, so completely was he into his role. But it bothered me. Was that gleam Abbott's version of "Ida O'Shey's" fever? No.

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It was unmistakably the gleam of love!

And it was unmistakably authentic. Later Lutz acknowledged that it was the real thing and not merely a remarkable bit of acting on Abbott's part.

And though Lutz found it an intriguing complication, I resented it. Not Abbott's inspiration of bringing "Ida O'Shey" north with a load of love in her heart, but that the gleam was in *Abbott's* eyes and that it was clearly the real thing.

I had never taken a huffy stance on how men ought to express their love for one another, figuring at most it was a question of manners. As for Lutz, he was unperturbed when he encountered man to man romances in his reading. Oddly liberal on the matter, he found these doings interesting, sometimes downright exciting.

However I resented finding one thing after being led to expect something altogether different. It seemed there was no end to Abbott's underhandedness, even when dealing with love. But I suppose most of my reaction rested on my basic lack of interest in climbing into bed with another fellow. The spectacle of two men cavorting struck me as one of the quainter, more special human phenomena that would no doubt prevail as long as there were men, though certainly no great issue was involved, and certainly no disease of the mind or spirit.

And on the matter of disease, Lutz stunned Abbott by asking, "By the way, what is the malady? I don't mean *your* malady," he quickly added when Abbott squinted up with mounting hostility, "I mean hers."

"What are you talking about?"

"The disease, Abbott. Something tropical, I'd guess. A rot, is it?—complicated by a touch of brain fever?"

"Are you saying she's ill?"

"And you do a pretty fair job of it. By the way, would you mind telling me how do you manage in your"—Lutz motioned to Abbott in general, down the length of him, including the tail—"your get-up. Poor fellow, under all that you're little more than skin and bones."

Now while Lutz manhandled "Ida O'Shey" on the sofa they were talking about poets and writers, mutual acquaintances. Lutz did some quoting for her, which she seemed to appreciate. Then he nuzzled her foggy hair and bit the soft thin lobe of her ear. "Please," she protested. Lutz sat up. "Another drink?" he panted.

"One more," she said, "then I must lie down." Lutz's nostrils flared. "Alone," she quickly added. "I'm exhausted."

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More drinks. Another assault—though Lutz was gentler. For Ida O'Shey was weakening. Lutz allowed his hands to be stayed with mere gestures.

And it had been at about that time, as Lutz helped her from the room, with her leaning on him and wheezing most piteously, that the faintest glimmer of a realization shone through to me, a realization which Lutz missed completely at the time and even now, as his words knocked about the room, whapping the walls and ceiling like great bats, while the dog suited individual sat staring off, obviously no longer listening. Lutz's words slowed and at last ceased. Abbott and I stared at each other.

"It's your fault. You should have told me she was coming. Why did you have to *trick* me? Don't you see that this calls for more than damned literary trickery and . . ."

He was already speaking. "Why were you so rude—and so damned cruel?"

"Because I thought she was you."

"What? You thought I . . . ?"

"In disguise—you! But worse still, you didn't warn me that she is dying."

Abbott came across the room. I thought he was going to put the bite on me again. I was too done in to resist. But he reared up with his forefeet on my chest and panting his dog breath in my face (a gruesome meaty smell, with cigars, liquor, and onions) he said, "Dying? Speak up. Now's no time for mumbling. Dying?"

"There's no doubt about it. She's dying. It's a certainty."

He dropped to all fours. "I didn't know. How could I have known?—she didn't mention it in her letters."

"Just as in your letters you failed to warn her that she should expect to find a fellow in a. . . ." But I trailed off.

Abbott slowly crossed the room and sat by a chair. Remembering himself, he jumped up into it and sat staring down. His mouth opened in that wide awful grin. "I. . . ." His voice cracked. "I don't know. . . ." When he tried again he uttered a strange thin sound, not the whine of a dog, though I suppose to an outsider it would have sounded like a fairly normal dog whine, but a nasal *iieeee* drawn out until, rising, it grew looser, plaintive, undeniably canine. He slumped out of the chair and, lifting his head, his mouth no longer hanging open in that panting grin but drawn down the muzzle in a pucker, he howled, and so convincingly, so awfully, that in spite of myself I shuddered and felt a prickle up the back of my neck as the howl echoed down the halls and through the empty rooms.

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POEMS

Marge Piercy

THE ANNEALING

We begin in a burning house.
We begin by bandaging each
other's wounds. We begin by
holding each other in night
streaked with tracer bullets
from lovers turned haters.

I hike toward you with pain
riding my back like a grandfather,
my blood burning its oil
from the murdered
leviathans of lost years.

Collision of choice and accident,
we are thrust at each other
like abandoned animals who crawl
shelter and bodily warmth.

With the stench of smoke
and soot, webs
and ashes in our hair,
none the less we carry
each embers of a hearth
fire we'll lay together
in the ruins where we
will build a new house
round as a sleeping cat, as
our clasped hands
founded as all living are
on the bedrock of death.

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Arthur Vogelsang

CALIFORNIA

Everyone has some trees, and I wanted to take you out under
mine,
The hairy shady ones and the ones with firecrackers hanging
down naturally
Or fastened by me, I wanted to abandon this phony voice
As we went through the patio or if it screamed don't leave me
Jesus I'll die
As we passed through the nice garden dragging it clamped tooth
and nail to our cuffs
And it had a headache from the even, massive hedges,
From the sight of women in grief and sexy
In nightgowns in the increasing light through doorways,
I would keep the house for it, little fierce violent doll with big
teeth
Jerking around the house biting the furniture,
And live out under these trees speaking directly like a saint
And simply like a good man, altering by degrees the gas flame of
my portable power,
To you and to those youngsters beyond the fence off a ways,
Cheering, at a distance, and the 4 billion beyond them.

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Everyone who had a life in the evil ugly desert knew he would
get lucky
Some day, either a huge herd of fat lambs would rampage
Over the dunes, dune after dune, shitting to a depth of 6 inches
Rich shit spreading like an insane river,
Or it would rain *there*, and not there, and the Russians would
die and *he* would live.
Most in these tribes had unnatural, half-baked voices like mine
In prayer but like you did not believe in apocalypse
As from bombs or a sour mist mixing volatilely with sand
As I believed, for they lived near an unfilled river
Whose substance filled their souls and grew a city of fat, wet
fruit.
By the way, there is a soul, and not just people
To love—Jews, Arabs, sand, oil, and poetry,
The holy geography of little hills and great trains the odor of
solder—
Or perhaps there is not.

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Days went by when driving itself was a pleasure and when it
wasn't I would
Turn around for an instant—on a white silver screen
Men who can build tires from wood and turn nuts and dance,
who have seductive
Many toned voices thrown in the service of their lord, country, or
ranch foreman
Are traveling great distances to fight beasts
Like redskins or the brute Hector for the love of a red-haired girl.
Or when one mile was too far I had a reverie on a crest, houses
contemporary, glass—
I saw our roof way down there, below it the bed of a dry river
primordial, further
Down on the royal road Spanish cut heads till the hair peeled
loose.
The sun was pure enjoyment. Second gear,
Dropping in the little blunt hills of the massacre,
A cloud slowly pivots to the shape of a hook,
Like iron and oil so deliberately turning to that one house
Upon the leaping, spiraling planet.

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Ira Sadoff

WALKING DOWN CASTRO STREET AFTER FRANK O'HARA

The streets of San Francisco
go on too long
which is a pleasant thing
like "going out of our way"
when we're just out walking
with no destination in mind

I'm in one of those moods
where I'm ready for anything
walking without purpose or compulsion
which doesn't mean you're not compelling
but I'm paying attention to the arguments
in the gay bars the fresh pasta stores
and Japanese Germans with cameras and musicians
whistling Fats Waller on the street corners

Who knows where this will lead to
is it the movie where Frank O'Hara appears
as a figure in a Larry Rivers painting
just because he might have observed these details
so casually they would all come together
in a loving assessment of the avenue
and the couples who love and hate one another
some of whom are lost without French Roast coffee
and others who don't quite know where they're going
in no particular hurry to arrive

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Clayton Eshleman

EQUAL TIME

Somehow it seems wrong,
a minute on Vietnam refugees
at sea, starving, not allowed to
dock, followed by a minute
on a new world's record in cherry
pit spitting, wrong because
the pit record trivializes a human
plight—so, should we dwell
on an imagined deck, imagined
cries? Somehow the dwelling itself
seems wrong, not only being here
but dwelling on what thought does
not alter. Or on what thought only
raises as thought, say my presenting
suffering to you as language
instead of handing you an actual
refugee. The baby wild hare
my son and I found had
abscessed legs, so we set it back
in its tall grass. Its tremble
brings the refugees closer, its being
alone, frightened, defenseless,
might enter the champion
cherry pit spitter's mind as
he dreams in a structure that includes
an altered sense of language
that must include the desert
mountains this morning not as part

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of the news but of the evolving net
writing poetry throws out,
wanting to include, hesitant to
look back, knowing violence and
the moral impossibility of balancing
the refugees, the pit champ and the hare—
or is the poem to fictionalize such
a balance, is it to hang each with a counterbalancing
weight so that, clearly unequal, they
float over to an immense ear, an Ithacan
grotto, as the magical things upon which
the homecome wanderer rests his head?
It is too easy in a world that refuses dockage
to refugees to play on the spit out pit,
to allow the Odysseus of one's imagination
to rest for more than a moment on
an archetypal pillow in which hare,
champ and refugee are bees, producing
a distinct but unified Mass, an eatable
hosea, a surge toward a drooping prophesied head
from which flows a common honey
—tu viens, cheri? This structure
must include a sweetness in bed
as well as the mascara in the coffin-
deep rue St.-Denis doorway where the empty
champ touches the abscessed refugee,
where he mounts her in the hold of
a dingy, stranded before a lighthouse coyote.

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Elizabeth Spires

THE TELESCOPE

It looked like any other town, only smaller.
There was a town square with a white tower
rising above trees tall as my thumbnail.
And painted storefronts out of a fairytale
with signboards advertising the town's wares.

Ships came and went in the harbor,
each one small as a ship in a bottle, but where
they were sailing to and whether it proved
the world was round or flat didn't matter.
(I hadn't felt the urge to travel yet.)

The sun behind my back, I saw the Spectacle
Shop look back, two eyes outlined on wood
in black, I saw the butcher's blade
sharpen itself on the block, paring the heart
from its cage of bone, I saw prisms and gears

and clocks striking in unison the hours
of forgetfulness. I lay in the fields, sleeping
whenever the town slept, dreaming myself
small as a key in a lock, then smaller still.
Or sleepless, I circled the town searching

for lighted windows, but the rooms were
poorly lit and the people only shadows;
when they touched each other,
their actions gave me pain, not pleasure,
and then I'd give up looking for an hour.

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Years passed and the faces grew familiar,
and after many years I recognized myself—
not as I am now but as a child
(nobody in the town ever grew older)—
playing the children's games, blindfolded,

staggering, or locked in a circle of hands
as the bigger children danced around
the others. But each time I stepped forward
to see better, the telescope I was holding
made the town seem smaller, till finally

no matter which lenses I used or
in what order, I knew there was a limit
on my sight, that years of vigilance were
unaccounted for. What could I hope for?
The child in the long skirts would

stay there past my life, accomplice to
cruelty and tenderness, the backward motion
of the children's dance reversing time's
advance. I left in the middle of the night,
not knowing where I would go,

the children's shouts following
me across the fields, fainter now,
but clear, untouchable stars burning
five-pointed holes in the dark, grieving,
leaving behind a useless telescope.

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Philip Levine

A SPIRIT

I wakened in the dark and waited—
the moon was riding over
the great city, and when I left
my bed and parted the curtains
I could see the distant spires
black against the blackened sky,
and a shower of cinders raining
from the four huge stacks
and burning to nothing like meteors
or like those lives we must have
known before this one. I thought
of the millions of sleepers around
me, the lives I would never
enter, and how awake now, I
was the one consciousness of all.
I shivered in the autumn night,
not so much from the cold but
from the sudden sense of all
the separate lives that came
close and touched mine
as the wings of a moth
flutter against your cheek
for a moment or the leaves
in a forest I entered once
to escape the rain. How

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at the first touch I had leaped
back as though they meant
me harm, but their soft
palms calmed me and I slept.
Now, I won't sleep. Millions
will, and someone must keep
watch over the night and later
welcome the first gray light
that leaks from nowhere
and fills the empty spaces until
at last a high window flashes
with a ray of sunlight. Once, I
slept along with all the others
and wakened to a glass of water,
bread, and steaming porridge.
Once I was a young man, wide
across the back, thick handed,
straining into my heavy clothes,
my gloves, my boots, a man
masked against the burning metals
that were the earth. But now
I am light, perhaps the spirit
of those I'll never know, uncertain,
but singing fully into the fire.

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Terry Stokes

UNTITLED

"There were woods in the back, and on one
side of the house. Therefore, it was a happy childhood"

It was a cold childhood surrounded by
all those lousy trees. My father
lived in the midwest; he moved in a hurry
just before I was born.

It was the only job available. My mother
carried me, & she wanted to see
what kind of stuff he was made of. My mother
& I stayed around for two months, crying

most of the time. My father thought
about suicide. It didn't make
for a pleasing two o'clock feeding.
I didn't miss him eventhough I suppose

I was supposed to. My mother wanted him
to disappear from the face of the earth.
So, she brought me to this town without a river,
but there are plenty of serene trees.

My fathers pop in & out like groundhogs.
They smile at me; they bring me things
to toy with. They want my mother, of course,
& they get her. My first father

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was buried last year in a pile
of rotting leaves. He froze-up,
his starter motor conked-out
on an unlit road. He tried to walk

the rest of the way; he lay down
for one of those moments
that seems to last forever.
No one taught me to miss him,

& I don't. I won't miss anything
that's wrapped-up in a skimpy coat
of leaves. I didn't even know
the tree. I'm not heartless;

I hate the wolf spiders here,
& I like to be held, & fussed over.
Fathers are a dime a dozen; mothers
come at a drop of a hat. I run

to the door, & sometimes I answer
when I am called for some unexplained reason.

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Stuart Kaufman

BUT NOT FOR

a quiet park on a noisy street
a library open to the public
beyond these mountains
a church in our community
drove through a tunnel
a new company in town
a medical school in this state
from the junior high school
at a dance for the seniors
a club for would-be writers
excelled in history and math
my grades in economics and art
took English literature
drove north and then west
the southern part of the city
on the east side of the street
these anniversaries, holidays
    and holy days
each week in spring and fall
wrote to his mother and dad
for Lauren's aunt and cousin
proposed by the new senator
We congratulated the senator.
for the major at the post
broadcast by the new pope
the president of our class
based on republican principles
drives a Rambler sedan
a Harlem basketball team
then turned to the god of fire
My dear Mr. Finch:
Fondly,
Very sincerely yours,
Waiting for Gordot
To Have and Have Not
"What," I asked, "did he say?"

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BOOKS

THE ELUSIVE CONRAD

JOSEPH CONRAD: THE THREE LIVES. By Frederick R. Karl. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $25.

If we try to think of Conrad's life as though it were a novel we find that we have difficulty in establishing "character" and its consequence, "plot." His life obstinately resists explanation at crucial points. This remains so even after one has read this latest biography by Frederick Karl, which utilizes all previous scholarship and strains for a sense of its subject's consistency. It is still a mystery why the sixteen-year old son of a political revolutionary in a landlocked country wanted to go to sea. Or why he joined the British merchant service, though he had first sailed on French vessels and hardly spoke English. His sea career, though it has been exhaustively tracked by Norman Sherry and others, does not come clear just when one is most anxious to make sense of it. There was, for example, the time when he suddenly threw up his job as a first mate, or, as he tells it in *The Shadow-Line*, "left in that, to us, inconsequential manner in which a bird flies away from a comfortable branch. It was as though all unknowing I had heard a whisper or seen something. One day I was perfectly right and the next everything was gone—glamour, flavour, interest, contentment—everything." Clearly, Conrad recognized in himself the effect of impulse, welling up from who knows where, disrupting his settled sense of himself and his fate. He would say in his middle age that "he had not known how to preserve against his impulses the order and continuity of his life."

Conrad's relations with women illustrate the absence of the usual kind of sexual "story." Karl attempts to make something of several unsubstantiated boyhood romances (as well as a possible postmarital one) but there is really *nothing* except the marriage to Jessie George at the age of thirty-nine. In the pseudoautobiography of *The Mirror of the Sea* and *Arrow of Gold*, Conrad himself felt compelled to invent an unbelievable youthful love affair in Marseilles with the mistress of the Spanish pretender. But there is no real evidence for it, though scholars have tried hard to establish some.

Karl does not probe the oddity of Conrad's sexual history, which

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is, rather, a nonhistory, without evidence or episodes. Putting it this way tempts one to speculate that Conrad was either a case of repression or of uncertain sexual selfhood. Perhaps a fear of women promoted his choice of the all male society of shipboard; his male friendships may have had a homosexual ingredient. What, then, was the cause of the breakdown which briefly brought Conrad over the brink of sanity in 1910? Illness and overwork forcing into the open long buried conflicts? Among immediate ingredients there is the effect of his break with Ford Madox Ford—a more than friend, a literary collaborator and secret sharer—when the latter fell in love with Violet Hunt. Afterwards, Conrad's writing changed, as Thomas Moser has demonstrated. Women played a greater role than in his earlier fictions, but as sentimental objects in melodrama. The subject of sex remained "uncongenial."

Conrad's marriage certainly had no romantic inevitability for him; it was another of those occasions about which it was necessary to maintain the fiction of meaningfulness. The day before the wedding he wrote Garnett: "When once the truth is grasped that one's own personality is only a ridiculous and aimless masquerade of something hopelessly unknown the attainment of serenity is not far off. Then there remains nothing but the surrender to one's impulses, the fidelity to passing emotions which is perhaps a nearer approach to truth than any other philosophy of life. And why not? If we are 'ever becoming—never being' then I would be a fool if I tried to become this thing rather than that, for I know well that I never will be anything."

But nothing is more mysterious than Conrad's turn to literature. In *A Personal Record* he collects dispersed personal memories about the start of *Almayer's Folly*, utilizing the characteristic impressionistic method employed in his novels—as though to suggest that these events were all in some nonlinear way connected with his sudden impulse to write, but none was its cause. He says: "the conception of a planned book was entirely outside of my mental range when I sat down to write; the ambition of being an author had never turned up amongst those gracious imaginary existences one creates fondly for oneself in the stillness and immobility of a daydream." There were certain immediate conditions, however. He could not get a captaincy on a seagoing vessel. He visited Poland to see his dying uncle, and revived the emotions of his childhood. He met Mme. Poradowska, a writer and a woman of mature charm for whom he seems to have been unable to acknowledge his feelings (she was a distant cousin, but he called her "aunt"). In Africa he went to the end of night, seeing some of the horrors

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perpetrated by the European civilizers, fell ill, and lingeringly suffered on his return. Out of all this turmoil may have come the discovery of writing as a means of recovery by retrieval and objectification of the past.

Karl calls Conrad a "marginal" man, by which, I think, he means something like Robert J. Lifton's concept of "protean man," that is, the characteristic unattached personality of modern times. But he is less interested in general cultural causes than in Conrad's private psychic determinants. In the tradition of Freud he believes in the primacy of the first chapter in a life-narrative, though, as I have noted, he is not keenly interested in his subject's sexuality. Conrad's marginality, says Karl, came out of his early sense of his condition as an orphan and a Pole. Losing both parents by the time he was twelve, Conrad absorbed the lesson of their tragic exile and suffering. In later life he would duplicate the patterns of their illnesses in himself and in his family. And yet he would try to avoid their fate; he would be strenuously unpolitical and suspicious of romantic idealism, having seen its tragic cost in the case of his father, and the failure of patriotism and heroism illustrated by the entire history of Polish nationalism. Here, for Karl, is the iterative scenario of Conrad's life. The abortive suicide at twenty-two is explained as Conrad's attempt to cut himself off, finally, from the claims of Poland. His breakdown at fifty-three is attributed to immersion in early memories brought on by the composition of his only Slavic novel, *Under Western Eyes* (the writing of the book was, Karl says, stimulated by the illness of Conrad's son, a reminder of his own childhood).

One may object to the application of this thesis to Conrad's fiction. *Lord Jim*'s romantic Stein seems to Karl simply Tadeusz Bobrowski, Conrad's conservative, unimaginatively benevolent uncle, and Jim is identified with Conrad's father even though Apollo Korzeniowski sacrificed himself for the public cause while Jim failed to maintain a personal ideal of conduct. *Nostromo* is reduced to "a testing out" of the Korzeniowski model and of Conrad's own reaction to his father's career, with Decoud acting the Bobrowski cynic to Gould's idealism. Karl's discussion of *Secret Agent* slights analysis of that complex novel to emphasize the role of its "incorruptible" professor, a "type that lay so deeply incapsulated within his psyche from earliest days." According to the same principle, in *Under Western Eyes* dim memories of his mother became Nathalie Haldin and her devotion to Apollo was duplicated in Nathalie's love for her brother.

Conrad's fiction does have a peculiar relation to actuality and is,

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in a more indirect way, autobiographical. He was frank in declaring the personal origins of many of his stories, and scholars have traced his characters and plots to persons and events met with in his travels. But the result of this research has been to show that one can no longer fill out the record by resorting to the fiction. Conrad is not to be trusted even in his autobiographical writings; even his letters contain statements that were meant to bolster the myths he himself created. The biographer must therefore study, as Albert Guerard did twenty years ago, how experience becomes personal myth and how myth becomes artistic symbol and style. Gustav Morf's influential thesis that Jim's *Patna* jump is a correlative for the writer's "standing jump out of his racial surroundings and associations" (Conrad's own words) still seems arguable on such grounds, even in the face of Karl's evidence that Conrad denied feelings of guilt about his expatriation.

Despite limitations of literary sensitivity, and the new biography's rather prolix structure, which makes reading it not only formidable but often confusing, Karl has done more for his subject than any previous biographer. At the very least he has updated the respectable if not brilliant *Life* by Jocelyn Baines which has been standard since 1960. Some major questions still remain unanswered. Did Conrad's personal life and artistic career together begin a decline after 1910 as Thomas Moser and the psychoanalyst-biographer Bernard Meyer insist? According to this thesis Conrad turned his back upon the dangerous introspection that had produced his dark masterpieces, sealed off his neuroses and "became as it were a literary Captain MacWhirr" (Meyer), producing fables of simplified characters subject to purely external forces. Much depends on one's evaluation of the late fictions, and Karl does not help us much here. He believes, but does not satisfactorily demonstrate, that *Chance* and its successors do not represent so much of a falling off as these critics claim. He thinks highly of *Victory*, though he finds no way to defend it against charges of failure of tone and clumsy narrative.

Still, the new biography gives a strangely impressive account of Conrad's last years. The spectacle of the aging genius grinding away at the mill to pay Jessie's medical bills is built up out of a full use, for the first time, of Conrad's correspondence with Pinker and others. The writer's indebtedness to his agent was an irremovable burden under which he sweated, sometimes stalling with false assurances of progress while he asked for further advances. He was, of course, his own most unmerciful master, un-self-sparing, despite his bouts of gout and the distractions and responsibilities of family life. "The ever present

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possibility of my own demise," he wrote Galsworthy, "I shall fight . . . tooth and claw. I must have 20 volumes behind me and there are only 11 written." *Chance*, the twelfth, was his first popular success. But Henry James, for whom Conrad had greater respect than for any other literary peer, wrote a slighting review, declaring it the exhibition of a "beautiful and generous mind at play in conditions comparatively thankless." It was "the *only* time a criticism affected me painfully," Conrad told John Quinn, the rich American lawyer.

Quinn was another commercial partner in Conrad's struggles. Conrad had begun to sell his manuscripts to him in 1911 and soon was sending him each new one as soon as his publishers were done with it, receiving substantial payments. It was all part of the aging laborer's effort to make literature pay. At the same time he was struggling to retain the attention of the literary public which was beginning to notice the "new novelists"—Joyce, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. To the last dream of art he *was* faithful, *usque ad finem*; yet he was haunted by the fear that he had not really gone forward, by the way his early work still pleased some readers best. To a French translator who wanted to tackle *Lord Jim*, he wrote, "I feel you'll grow extremely weary of it long before the end. The other day I found that I could not read it myself to the end. It bored me."

MILLICENT BELL

VULGAR AND NONVULGAR IDEALISM

BACK TO KANT: THE REVIVAL OF KANTIANISM IN GERMAN SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL THOUGHT, 1860–1914. By Thomas E. Willey. Wayne State University Press. $17.95.

Over twenty years ago, Fritz Stern coined the term "vulgar idealism" to characterize the illiberal, anti-Western, and irrationalist world view of the unpolitical Germans of the Wilhelmian era. In his important new book, *Back to Kant*, Thomas Willey argues instead that the nonvulgarized idealism of that period, known broadly as *neo-Kantianism*, embodied all of the contrary values. True to Kant's original emphasis on reason, individualism, and the rule of law, the neo-Kantians, albeit with certain exceptions, were loyal cosmopolitan sons of the Western Enlightenment, anxious to realize their lofty ideals

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in social and political terms. Moreover, as Willey portrays them, they expressed less a narrowly bourgeois ideology of class defense, as has often been alleged, than a fervently held hope for class reconciliation in an increasingly polarized world. In short, "nothing more quickly dispels the notion that the Second Reich was an era exclusively of *Völkisch* neoromanticism, ambivalent social democracy, and state-worshiping liberalism than a study of neo-Kantianism."

In attempting to establish this point, Willey shows himself to be a highly skillful cicerone of the neo-Kantian movement, which he traces from its origins in the 1850s to its demise in the First World War. He provides lucid, but not overly technical accounts of the thought of the movement's major figures, as well as lively summaries of their careers. Beginning with Rudolf Hermann Lotze, Otto Liebmann (who coined the phrase "Back to Kant"), Kuno Fischer, Eduard Zeller, and Friedrich Albert Lange, Willey proceeds through the dominant schools of the 1890s in Marburg and in Baden, and concludes with the more familiar figures of the movement's waning years, Weber, Troeltsch, Meinecke and Cassirer. He follows I.M. Bochenski's lead in isolating four common premises shared by the seven distinct neo-Kantian schools:

> 1) They use the transcendental method as opposed to the psychological or empirical, that is, they seek the prior conditions of knowing and willing. 2) They are *conceptualists,* by which is meant that they deny intellectual intuition as a source of genuine knowledge and believe in the capacity of reason "for constructing a whole for its parts," the capacity for synthesis. Knowledge of contents or essences is ruled out. 3) Their epistemologies are *idealist.* "Knowledge is not the grasp but the construction of the object." 4) To understand Kant is to go beyond him. For instance, they all reject the unknowable ground of experience, the notorious thing-in-itself.

Willey adds a fifth premise, the primacy of practical reason within a still dualistic framework, which was so crucial to their highly moralistic posture. In spelling out the implications of these assumptions as they were developed by the major figures and schools, Willey provides a guidebook more comprehensive and accessible than any other in English; here is a case of the proverbial gap in the literature really being filled.

But *Back to Kant*'s larger claim to importance lies in its attempt to defend neo-Kantianism as a historically significant antidote to that unpolitical "vulgar idealism" identified by Stern and many others as

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dominating Wilhelmian Germany. Willey's case begins with his characterization of the origins of the movement in the wake of the celebrated debate over materialism at Göttingen in 1854. Rather than emerging from an irrationalist or intuitionist critique of science as it has often been claimed, neo-Kantianism began as an attempt to save science from the crude scientism of such vulgar materialists as Büchner and Vogt. In the Marburg School of the subsequent generation, this same impulse, grounded in Kant's first *Critique*, would be particularly strong. Neo-Kantianism's other major stimulus, according to Willey, was the relativistic implications of historicism and what was left of Hegelianism in the years after 1848. Here the Baden School of Rickert and Windelband with their search for values amidst the flux of history, a search which so enriched the logic of the cultural sciences, was the primary heir. "Back to Kant" was thus paradoxically both a return from speculation to critical thinking and a quest for a new foundation for absolute values; not surprisingly, its history would be marked by severe and increasingly irreconcilable tensions.

Willey also ties neo-Kantianism to the short-lived liberal "New Era" of 1858–1861, although he argues that the failures of liberalism soon led several neo-Kantians, most notably Lange and then later the leader of the Marburg School, Hermann Cohen, towards a non-Marxist socialism. Their respect for free will meant an antipathy towards determinism or monism in any form, whether crude materialist, Hegelian, or Second International Marxist. And because of this voluntarist emphasis, they were able to provide useful ammunition for those Marxists, ranging from revisionists like Eduard Bernstein to radicals like Kurt Eisner, who were impatient with the fatalistic orthodoxy of the German Social Democratic party. Willey's heart clearly belongs to the moderates, but he is also willing to defend Eisner and the more extreme neo-Kantian "activists" of the early Weimar era against the criticism of those, like George Mosse, who have charged them with impractical ethical absolutism.

Willey's portrayal of the intentions of the neo-Kantians seems essentially just; despite exceptions such as Paul Natorp, who became a rabid chauvinist during the war, they seem like legitimate models of that "other Germany" so often neglected in hasty summaries of German culture and its failings. And yet, when one looks more closely at the substance of their position (or more correctly put, the common denominator of their several positions) and the record of their political interventions, the picture becomes considerably murkier. A good place to begin is Willey's assertion that they represent an honest attempt to

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transcend class differences. In a long footnote directed against Fritz Heinemann's charge that Cohen's philosophy in particular represented "the swan song of the middle class, the final apologia for the cultural manifest destiny of the bourgeoisie," Willey points to Cohen's social democratic political sympathies and his universalistic refusal to assign a privileged role to the middle class. What Willey, however, ignores is the way in which Cohen's abstract universalism fits well with the traditional *Bildungsbürgertum*'s pretensions to transcend class conflict. Although it is true that more cynical and realistic ideologues in Wilhelmian Germany had turned to franker defenses of class superiority, it had long been a staple of bourgeois ideology to cloak that defense in universalist terms. This tactic was especially attractive to the mandarinate whose ties to the bureaucracy meant that they identified themselves with the state as a whole. Cohen's universalism, to be sure, was more genuinely Kantian in its relatively cosmopolitan tenor than was most of theirs, but it was no less illusory. It was no coincidence that it served a particular function for those German Jews, for whom Cohen was a leading spokesman, who sought assimilation as "German Citizens of the Jewish Faith" on the grounds that Judaism was little more than neo-Kantianism in religious garb. Abstract universalism was an antidote to both class and ethnic hostility, or so it seemed for a few brief decades. By the end of Cohen's own life in 1918, however, the folly of this assumption had become all too obvious; Cohen himself spent his last years returning to Jewish concerns and by the 1920s new figures in the Jewish community like Gershom Scholem and Franz Rosenzweig had rejected neo-Kantianism altogether.

The failure of neo-Kantianism as a bridge between Jewish and gentile Germany, which Willey treats only in passing, was emblematic of its general political recklessness. Rickert and Windelband's attempts to find transcendent values and answer the relativistic implications of historicism were in vain, as Troeltsch and Weber came to recognize. The Baden School, for all its sophisticated methodological analysis of the cultural and social sciences, had nothing direct to say about concrete political problems. Their colleagues in Marburg, who paradoxically were more interested in the epistemology of science than in history, did try to influence the political scene, but with little real impact. Concerned with moral dignity and rational discourse, but construing these in essentially formal terms, they had little to offer a society in which consensus was proving increasingly difficult to obtain. Moreover, as Willey himself concedes, "given the refeudalization of the German middle class and the organization of commerce,

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industry, and agriculture into powerful pressure groups, as well as the unrepresentative character of Prussian politics, the proposed alliance between evolutionary socialism and democratic liberalism had little chance of success." Indeed, when the Weimar Republic was founded more or less on the basis of such an alliance, these obstacles, reinforced as they were by the international political and economic situation, were still formidable enough to lead to disaster. Willey's remark that the "vigor of social democracy in the Federal Republic today is in some measure indirectly owed" to neo-Kantian efforts, provides only a minor correction to the general verdict of impotency, even for those who agree with his dubious attribution of vigor to the socialism of Helmut Schmidt and his colleagues.

The source of this political failure lies, however, in more than the "serious imbalance between theory and practice" emphasized by Willey; for the theory itself, in whatever form, was seriously deficient. Willey's general sympathy for neo-Kantianism prevents him from understanding the very serious reasons why it ultimately was abandoned by most German intellectuals. He never, in fact, pays serious attention to figures like Emil Lask, who turned against it, or Georg Lukacs, who wrote its most penetrating epitaph. Instead, he rests content with generalizations about the "disorder and disillusionment in German life and the attendant desire for something more conducive to one's spiritual security than cold logic." In his eyes, this desire meant a flagging of the critical spirit and an irrational return to speculation and mysticism. Although in part this judgment is correct insofar as a plethora of pseudosolutions, religious and aesthetic as well as political, were eagerly adopted by many Germans anxious for holistic certainty. But for others with more sober and responsible intentions, neo-Kantianism proved equally deficient. Indeed, as Heinrich Levy pointed out as early as 1927, the so-called "Hegel Renaissance" of the Weimar era was led by many neo-Kantians themselves. It was no less a figure than Windelband, in his famous lecture of 1910, who first coined that term to describe the sense of impatience with Kantian criticism that began well before the war.

Indeed, many Weimar thinkers came to insist that neo-Kantianism was not critical enough, especially of its own underpinnings. That is, it had failed to question its own essentially ahistorical and overly rationalistic assumptions about subjectivity and the role of ideas in shaping social life. Whether from Husserl, Heidegger, Buber, Barth, Lukacs, or Jaspers, the cry was for more concreteness and less abstraction, for a philosophy that would take into account the lived experi-

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ence of men who were more than their transcendental apperceptions. Whether or not these philosophies were any more productive politically is another question, but at least they pointed in directions which twentieth century man would find far more promising. Although the excesses to which these various creeds sometimes led their followers makes a kind of nostalgic yearning to go "Back to Kant" seem attractive, there can be little doubt that neo-Kantianism is a thin reed on which to build a viable social and political theory. Mandarin idealism, in short, never was and never will be a real antidote to vulgar idealism, despite the good intentions of its proponents then and now.

MARTIN JAY

FOR INTERPRETATION

THE GENESIS OF SECRECY: ON THE INTERPRETATION OF NARRATIVE. By Frank Kermode. Harvard University Press. $10.

What does it mean to read? This is the question posed by Frank Kermode's elegant and suggestive new book as by much contemporary speculation on the subject of interpretation. Kermode's controlling thesis is indeed fashionable among "advanced" critical circles: that, "broadly conceived, the power to make interpretations is an indispensable instrument of survival in the world, and it works there as it works on literary texts." But if everything is constitutionally a matter of interpretation, if the world and other people are woven texts to be read, each text being a world in itself, can one ever be sure of reading aright? Kermode parleys with both sides in the traditional *querelle* between a historical or philological perspective, bent on approximate knowledge of the original context of the work and the intentions of its author, and a more magical, "imperialist" attitude, seeking in a privileged moment to divine or bring to light meanings hidden from earlier readers and thus to recreate the classic, all the while presupposing that perception is never disinterested. Focusing this theoretical dilemma in a secular approach to the Scriptures, he invokes Hermes, as guardian over roads and commerce and patron of interpreters, for aid in "going-between." But having at length consulted with the scholars, or "insiders," he seems finally—"hot for secrets"—to prefer the more

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romantic, divinatory alternative: "We cannot emigrate from our historical moment. . . . There has to be trickery. And we interpret always as transients . . . our sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance. . . ."

This is in part a defense of the values of intensity not so different from the position of Kermode's earlier, well known study, *Romantic Image* (1957), which takes as its credo "a belief in the Image as a radiant truth out of space and time, and in the necessary isolation and estrangement of men who can perceive it." Already here truth is conceived in opposition to scientific or discursive modes, while the artist is seen as a kind of Dionysian priest, burdened with irreconcilable differences. The poem is valued as a precarious "victory," in Yeatsian parlance, over all that is loose and contingent, all battered kettles at the heel. Arguing for a continuity between nineteenth and twentieth century poetry, *Romantic Image* helped to make Symbolist mythologies familiar to the clerisy.

Since then, like the rest of the English-speaking world, Kermode has stayed attuned to continental influences. In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, he makes use of not only a wide range of New Testament exegesis, but also current theory of narrative (Jean Starobinski, A.-J. Greimas) and modern philosophical hermeneutics (H.G. Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur). His view of reading as conversation or *translatio*, explicitly contrasted with the pre-eminent rationalist view of E.D. Hirsch, appears particularly indebted to Gadamer's work on the problem of self-understanding: "To understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue. . . . [The interpreter] must take up into himself what is said to him in such fashion that it speaks and finds an answer in the words of his own language."

The modern idea of interpretation, from Gadamer to Derrida, is specifically rooted in Heidegger's obscure discourse about language, or "linguisticality," according to which the world for each of us is always already given in the realm of language, for we come to think and act only in that realm. All the work of the hand, he can say, is silent speech. Nietzsche had reasoned that for a fact to exist we must first introduce meaning, and Heidegger, harking back to Parmenides, considers that language is "the house of Being," *about* it in the way that a house is about its space, sustaining and sheltering, but also "calling" and bodying it forth. To be is to dwell. Husserl's idea of intention is interpreted ontologically, to the exclusion of the Cartesian or transcendental ego, so that now, for Heidegger, "language speaks us." A being is an expression, an articulation: a text. If we are not

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wrapped up in the personal, we may be played by the emergent subject matter, "what is said," as players are played by the game. The thinker must cultivate a no doubt politically suspect readiness, must learn to listen. For what is said inevitably leads back behind itself, carries implications or subtexts. The problem of language becomes the problem of "the unsaid," and Heidegger looks to etymology for revealing the budlike essences of things as they are evoked in words. In the digging for etymons, he rediscovers an ancient originary burden running through the most ordinary language ("figuring things out"). Henceforth no speech is without its secrecy. Word and world appear necessarily multidimensional, and the interpreter—etymologically akin to the peddler and the prostitute—must negotiate with distance.

Heidegger's conception of truth as *aletheia*, or unconcealment—more precisely, a reciprocal play of Lethe and Aletheia assumed to be more primary than propositional or mathematical truth—decisively informs Kermode's approach to narrative. He asks whether narratives are not always in some degree hermetically opaque and reticent, the vehicles of "simultaneous proclamation and concealment." Like dreams and riddles, they call for interpretative completion, even as they love to hide. The text is to be understood as a "hermeneutic potential," the bundled plural meanings of which get actualized by readers who can never know for sure if they are on the inside or the outside. A sophisticated reading will probe beyond the literal and commonplace "carnal" significance to one more "spiritual"—which generally means, for Kermode, more allegorical or typological. As with happy and unhappy families, "carnal readings are much the same [while] spiritual readings are all different"—but this is perhaps to underestimate, or "forget," the varieties and depths of the carnal.

Such spiritual or antimimetic bias is usually countered in Kermode's work by a native pragmatism and common sense, a confidence in "the *lingua franca* of reality" and in the traditions of authority and civility associated with Latin civilization, what Eliot called "the mind of Europe." The "provincial" and revolutionary aesthetic theology of Nietzsche and Heidegger is accommodated into, and kept in check by, a distinctly British institutionalism, a tacit faith in the canonical and hermeneutic sanctions of the professional community. Interpretation is controlled above all by a sense of propriety, which entails an educated awareness of generic probabilities, the set of expectations exterior to a text which enable us to follow that text, whether it is a sentence, a book, or a life." Competence in a reader is loosely predicated on familiarity with literary conventions, along with instinctive

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trust, as he says in *The Classic* (1975), in "the possibility of effective ethical choices."

Kermode's own readings here in the Gospels and in selected modern novels are often brilliant. He is particularly good on the knotted texture of Mark's narrative and on the ways in which Matthew, working in the tradition of Midrash, elaborates and deepens the character of Judas. He has some striking things to say about the apocalyptic and figural significance of the codex, which the early Christians preferred to the unfolding Jewish role, and which becomes the mold of the novel. Together with Robert Alter's articles on the Old Testament, this book should encourage more literary critics to pick up their Bibles.

HOWARD EILAND

THE LONG LIFE OF MODERNISM

FACES OF MODERNITY: AVANT-GARDE, DECADENCE, KITSCH. By Matei Calinescu. Indiana University Press. $15.

FIVE TEMPERAMENTS: ELIZABETH BISHOP, ROBERT LOWELL, JAMES MERRILL, ADRIENNE RICH, JOHN ASHBERY. By David Kalstone. Oxford University Press. $10.95.

FOUR POSTWAR AMERICAN NOVELISTS: BELLOW, MAILER, BARTH, AND PYNCHON. By Frank D. McConnell. University of Chicago Press. $15.

During the decade that followed World War II, we in the English-speaking world came to feel that a great literary period was coming to a close. The most gigantic figures—Lawrence, Yeats, Joyce—were dead. Others—Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot, Pound—were still alive and productive; then they too died, in that order. The younger writers of the forties and fifties were turning the innovations of the masters into a new academic style; or else they were abandoning the pretense of innovation—like Auden in his later work, or Philip Larkin. The energies of the age were largely devoted to criticism ("The Age of Criticism," Randall Jarrell called it in a condemnatory essay), because the time had come to assimilate the vast accumulation of new treasure before we could move on.

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A literary period had taken shape—beginning around 1885 and apparently ending after World War II—which came, by one of those historical miracles of common agreement, to be called *modernist*, anachronistic as it seemed to call a period of the past *modern*. One sign that the period had come to an end was that so many critics were now trying to define it. "What Was Modernism?" asked Harry Levin and many others. "The most important recent event," says Matei Calinescu in *Faces of Modernity*, the latest attempt at definition, is "the desynonymization of 'modern' and 'contemporary'"—the recognition, in other words, that all contemporary art is not necessarily modernist. Already in the fifties the "Beats," led by Allen Ginsberg, were pointing toward the new generation of writers who in the sixties called themselves *postmodernists*, thus declaring that a distinction had to be drawn between two literary periods.

The best book on modernism is Renato Poggioli's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1962; translated from the Italian, 1968), which is continental in its theoretical approach, drawing examples mainly from the French, Italian, and Russian avant-gardes. Calinescu's *Faces of Modernity*, which is also continental in its examples, takes off from Poggioli's book but adds little to it; for Calinescu lacks Poggioli's theoretical power. Calinescu's way of introducing a literary movement is to define its name in the original Latin and move on through changing definitions. He circles around a subject but never seems able to get to the center of it. The book's best remarks are in the quotations. The book is mainly valuable for its quotations, which are drawn from an impressively wide range of reading, and for certain amplifications and modifications of Poggioli.

Calinescu, for example, thinks it important to distinguish between *avant-garde* and *modernism*, and takes issue with Poggioli and others for equating them. Poggioli argues that the avant-garde or modernism, despite its often antiromantic stance, derives from romanticism; for it was romanticism which first conceived that a work of art must be an expression of its time and that therefore made innovation a supreme good in art. Calinescu agrees, citing Stendhal's definition of romanticism as the art of the present and Baudelaire's definition of it as "the most contemporary form of the beautiful." Because romantic art should be different from *everything* done in the past, Baudelaire saw "an obvious contradiction between romanticism and the works of its principal adherents." Baudelaire's "romanticism," as Calinescu suggests, is "antiromantic" or "modern." We are now in a position to understand that modernism and (as the other two books under review

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indicate) postmodernism are a working out of romanticism's most extreme implications.

Calinescu follows Poggioli in showing that *avant-garde* meant, for mid-nineteenth century French socialists, politically radical, and he shows that it still has this political meaning in Marxist and Leninist writing—which is why Marxist critics prefer the term *bourgeois decadent* for avant-garde art. It was in the 1870s, after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the suppression of the Paris Commune, that *avant-garde* began to designate also, as a secondary meaning, a separate artistic movement. This happened because artists and radicals found themselves united in their hatred of the bourgeois order they held responsible for France's defeat. This union, which was expressed in literature by naturalism, lasted until the 1880s when the literary movement, which had passed into symbolism, split off. Now the secondary meaning became primary; it became possible to be both avant-garde and reactionary—to believe in artistic innovation while disbelieving in the efficacy of material and political progress. Calinescu objects to "Poggioli's idea of an abrupt and *complete* divorce of the two avant-gardes," but does nothing to argue his perfectly valid point. It is true that the artistic avant-garde has never ceased to respond, even if variously and unpredictably, to political events—the Bolshevik Revolution, the rise of fascism, and most recently American intervention in Vietnam.

Since his book is more recent, Calinescu goes farther than Poggioli in discussing the so-called "death of the avant-garde," whose works have since the early fifties been voraciously consumed by the very bourgeois whose values they reject. "Today's avant-garde has actually no enemy to fight." Avant-garde artists, I would add, find themselves rich and famous when they had primed themselves for suffering. This accounts, I suspect, for the tragedy of Mark Rothko whom I met just as he was becoming discouraged by his new pecuniary success. Another example is the immediate success of a revolutionary and difficult young novelist like Thomas Pynchon, who hides himself from public view in order to minimize the dangers of success. With only three novels to his credit, Pynchon has been turned into an instant classic by eager young academicians who are themselves primed to be promoters of avant-garde art. This paradoxical situation has, however, produced not "death" but a very lively scene in all the arts.

Calinescu gives a long, informative account of the relation between decadence and modernism, showing like Poggioli how decadence prepares the ground for modernism. His most valuable chapter is

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the one on kitsch—a subject not touched by Poggioli who suggests that avant-garde art when it fails becomes an "academy," a "fashion," or a "stereotype." These are more favorable words than the German *kitsch* which denotes, according to Calinescu, a bad and especially a mass-produced imitation of high art—high art made easy. Kitsch, with its false sophistication, replaces genuine folk art; it is the product of a culture in which everyone aspires to be middle-class. Kitsch is also the product of an industrial system in which work is so unsatisfying that we want art to give us—in words that the Marxist Adorno applies mistakenly only to proletarians—"relief from both boredom and effort simultaneously." Kitsch is the price paid for the relativism of aesthetic judgment and freedom of artistic practice instituted by romanticism; for with no fixed standards, taste becomes increasingly problematical.

As an example of kitsch Calinescu quotes Roger Fry's description of the appalling amount of "art" in a Victorian-type railway refreshment room—all of it there to confer social status on the room. The average man would be resentful, writes Fry, "if everything were merely clean and serviceable." Yet we have nowadays a kitsch of functional décor. We used to think of kitsch as opposed to modernism, but there has developed a pernicious modernist kitsch in a market where innovation has become an end in itself and (especially in painting) so commercially valuable. Calinescu ignores this problem. He writes as though he can at all times distinguish genuine from fake art, but he never analyzes a specific work to show us why it is kitsch. He says in passing that Marcel Duchamp "was largely kitschified by Andy Warhol," but he does not explain why Warhol's put-ons, his glorified soup cans, are kitsch when he considers Duchamp's mustached Mona Lisa art *because* it is a put-on. There would be no use for the word *kitsch*, says the Italian semiologist Umberto Eco in "The Structure of Bad Taste," if high art could be distinguished from kitsch as clearly as it can be distinguished from street signs. Calinescu himself writes perceptively of "the curious semiotic ambiguity of most kitsch objects," which "are intended to look both genuine and skillfully fake"—genuine in order to indicate their elite status, fake in order to insist upon their "antielitist availability." Although Poggioli's is still *the* book to read on modernism, Calinescu's is worth reading for its quotations, information, and discussion of kitsch.

It is interesting to turn to the other two books under review and consider the extent to which the principles of modernism formulated by Poggioli and Calinescu apply to the serious poetry and fiction produced in America since World War II. Both David Kalstone in *Five*

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Temperaments—a study of Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Lowell, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, and John Ashbery—and Frank D. McConnell in *Four Postwar American Novelists*—a study of Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, John Barth, and Thomas Pynchon—suggest that their writers are postmodernists who have made no definitive break with modernism. They agree with Poggioli and Calinescu that their postmodernists belong with the modernists to the large romantic tradition. Their postmodernists emerge as even more explicitly romantic than the modernists.

Kalstone's book is singularly unambitious. He is not at all interested in setting his five poets in a social context, and he only occasionally compares them to each other and to their great predecessors of the previous generation. He makes no relative evaluations. All Kalstone sets out to do is to enhance our understanding and appreciation of his poets, and this he accomplishes through admirably sensitive and lucid readings that indicate thematic and stylistic continuity and development and the distinctive virtues for which each poet is to be appreciated. Since a critic should be judged by what he has set out to do, Kalstone's book must be accounted successful as an introduction to these poets.

The only generalization by which Kalstone combines his poets is this—that they are more frankly autobiographical and somewhat freer in style than their more formalist predecessors. It is clear from both Kalstone's and McConnell's books that we have seen since World War II yet another romantic revival, yet another step in the working out of the romantic idea; so that for the younger poets Blake, Wordsworth, and Whitman became relevant again as Donne and Marvell had been for the previous generation. A similar movement took place in criticism when around 1957 a few of us published books that, as an answer to the New Critics, gave a high valuation to romanticism and argued for it as a continuing modern tradition.

Kalstone demonstrates this change in the career of Robert Lowell, who broke with his modernist style, what he called "my old New Criticism religious symbolic poems," when in March 1957 he made a trip to San Francisco, "the era and setting of Allen Ginsberg," said Lowell, where "poets were waking up prophets." Out of this trip came *Life Studies* (1959), the volume that marks Lowell's transition to a free confessional style. Another influence on *Life Studies* was Elizabeth Bishop, praised by Lowell as "Unerring Muse who makes the casual perfect." From Bishop Lowell learned—in for example the greatest poem of *Life Studies*, "Skunk Hour," which is dedicated to her—to

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move toward his purpose through offhand, apparently random statements and through objective description.

Elizabeth Bishop, though her "almost toneless observer" becomes in some of the later poems an "I," has not changed style and remains a modernist working like Marianne Moore through the accumulation of intensely perceived details. "Bishop lets us know," says Kalstone acutely, "that every detail is a boundary, not a Blakean microcosm." She seems to me to have perfected the art of epiphany in just Joyce's sense of the word, for her self-sufficient details suddenly—as she herself said of Darwin's—sink or slide "giddily off into the unknown." Even Lowell remains half a modernist in that, as I see it, he combines with his new Whitmanesque freedom the wry, ironic diction of modernist poetry and, as Kalstone points out, he worries like Eliot and Pound over lost connections with the past as James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, and other younger poets do not.

Merrill, who has been mainly influenced by Proust, is nourished by a continuing access to childhood memories as Lowell, who finds memory a curse, is not. But Merrill does not as autobiographical poet try to capture the raw feel of the moment; he offers instead a continuous artistic revision of his life. Merrill's phrase, "That life was fiction in disguise" is, Kalstone suggests, his leading idea. Merrill is, in other words, an aesthete who believes that experience exists only inasmuch as it has been expressed through art. In this, as in his use of the occult in his recent volume *Divine Comedies*, he reminds me in a small scale way of Yeats.

Adrienne Rich does try to capture the raw feel of the moment, and worries over the reduction of momentaneous feeling by language. "A language," she has written, "is the map of our failures." John Ashbery, too, works for immediacy but in a more interesting way (I don't see how Kalstone can resist making such relative evaluations). For Ashbery is interested not only in feelings but in "getting into remoter areas of consciousness." He does this in the romantic way by breaking the "packaging," as he puts it in a poem, "which has supplanted the old sensations." He works through random associations as Bishop works through random observations—he has spoken of the need to combine "meaningfulness" with "randomness." But Ashbery breaks through into "opacity" rather than the clarity of epiphanic vision. Ashbery is the most innovative of these five poets; for, like the action painters, he projects the activity of consciousness during the process of creation. The point of his innovations is best illustrated by "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," which, as Kalstone demonstrates in a masterful

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reading, portrays through its study of convexity the relativist "unframeable nature of experience."

The slightness of innovation in these five poets makes me wonder whether they ought to be separated from the modernists as a separate school. The "new surrealists" (Bly, Merwin, Kinnell, Strand, Wright, Tate) seem more innovative, but as surrealists they follow another aspect of modernism. Kalstone's five autobiographical poets represent a small local reaction against modernist formalism, which was itself a reaction within the larger romantic tradition. "All Romantic and post-Romantic poetry could be considered," says Kalstone by way of conclusion, "'autobiographical.'" Contemporary autobiographical poetry is distinguished by "faithfulness to a social surface. . . . But that poetry is still re-enacting the struggles with consciousness which have enriched and bedevilled lyric poetry since Wordsworth."

Frank D. McConnell, whose *Four Postwar American Novelists* is the most brilliant of the three books under review, makes me feel that recent American fiction—as represented by Mailer's last two novels and the novels of Barth and Pynchon—has been more innovative than recent American poetry. The narrative techniques described here go beyond the great modernist novels—except for Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1939), the model for many of these innovations. But then *Finnegan's Wake*, a book we have still to catch up with, may well represent, as T.S. Eliot pointed out, the dead-end of the novel's possibilities.

McConnell is very much interested in showing the influence of history upon his four novelists. He calls the period since World War II "post-Apocalyptic," with the war figuring as the Apocalypse. McConnell is young; and it is the young, who do not remember World War II, who speak of it as catastrophic, likening it to the Vietnam War. We who fought World War II, instead, think of its happy ending and of what a world run by Hitler would be like. McConnell, however, argues against the happy apocalypticism of Genet, William Burroughs, and Norman O. Brown, which declares that the old world having been abolished we are now free to celebrate the guiltless life of the senses. McConnell argues for the conservative responsible nature of his four novelists who are out to construct what Carlyle called—in defining the reconstructive task of the romantic generation that followed the iconoclastic Enlightenment—a "new Mythus." The "'post-Apocalyptic'" novelists, says McConnell, represent "a reversion from" the destructive "early modernist vision" in their "attempt to locate, within the very center of the contemporary wasteland, mythologies of

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psychic survival and social, political health."

Such a statement overemphasizes the negative impulse of early modernist works which with time—*The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* are prime examples—have come to seem increasingly affirmative. It is true, however, that the early modernists started as Victorians and grew up into disillusion; whereas the World War II generation inherited their disillusion. We *started* with the feeling that disillusion and alienation could go no farther. "A truly conservative fiction," says McConnell, would have to accept "the corrosive assertions of modern thought" and then "build again the myth of the [Good] City upon the deceptive, shifty, unstable foundations of our realization of that myth's own fictiveness." Such a fiction would renew, in other words, the romantic enterprise—as McConnell indicates by saying that "our own literature helps us recognize tendencies and forces within the romantic movement itself, whose real nature had to wait until the present to be made manifest."

I am impressed by McConnell's sympathetic treatment of Saul Bellow, who with his realism and traditional morality is the least innovative of these four novelists and the one whom we might have thought the sixties had rendered obsolete. But McConnell is unusual—different, for example, from Morris Dickstein in his recent book on the sixties—in treating sixties *writing* (not, I might add, its life-style) as continuous with the whole post-World War II tradition. McConnell tries to clear Bellow of the nowadays damaging charge of "fifties-style" realism by suggesting that he has always mixed realism with fantasy in the manner of the Yiddish storytellers and that it required "the absurdist explosion of sixties fiction for his novels to be put in a true perspective." It is significant, I think, that Bellow in his Nobel Prize statement showed his appreciation of Isak Dinesen's antirealistic tales. In *Henderson: The Rain King* Bellow anticipates, says McConnell, the "antinovels" of the sixties; and though *Mr. Sammler's Planet* attacks the sixties, that stormy decade raised all the questions that Bellow had been asking for twenty years about the relation between romantic self-liberation and the needs of a culture healthy enough to sustain the self. McConnell considers that *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow's latest and "most satisfying artistic performance" is in line with the novels of Barth and Pynchon, in that it uses fictiveness itself as the answer to the characters' problems.

Mailer's novels move in a direction opposite to Bellow's, for Mailer's heroes seek that confrontation with the void "from which Bellow's tales begin their exemplary voyages back to the civilized."

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Those who seek that confrontation are "the naked"—according to McConnell's perceptive interpretation of Mailer's title to his first novel—while those who avoid the confrontation are "the dead." The chapter on Mailer is McConnell's weakest, since he is in the position of declaring Mailer a major novelist who has written only one successful novel, his first. And that novel, despite McConnell's arguments for its technical innovativeness, must be recognized as a success in the received naturalistic style of war novels. McConnell admits as much in acknowledging that Mailer spectacularly sought, after *The Naked and the Dead,* for a new style; but he clearly does not consider that Mailer broke through to this new style. He dismisses *An American Dream* as "allegory," which shows that he has not understood it; and though he appreciates *Why Are We in Vietnam?,* he appreciates its parody but not its poetic vision and remarkable treatment of nature—so cannot account for Mailer's estimate of it as his best novel.

"To acknowledge what I'm doing while I'm doing it is exactly the point," Barth writes in a story called "Title." This twin interest in the story and in the art or experience of writing it, this emphasis on the fictiveness of the fiction, can be traced as far back as *Tristram Shandy* but has been particularly evident since the sixties. In "The Literature of Exhaustion," his *Atlantic* article of 1967, Barth classes himself with writers like Beckett and Borges who project as part of their content "the used-upness of certain forms or exhaustion of certain possibilities." This kind of writing might be called, nonpejoratively, *decadent* in its awareness of coming at the end of a long tradition and in its devotion to the recapitulation of that tradition. McConnell shows how Barth filters events and characters through all their possible patterns in fiction and myth. In this Barth imitates in a small way I think *Finnegan's Wake,* where Joyce does this also with linguistic patterns. In *The End of the Road,* Barth sees how paralyzing such total comprehension—which he calls *cosmopsis*—can be. But in *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *Giles Goat-Boy,* as McConnell shows through fine readings, Barth achieves a comic comprehensiveness that is life-enhancing. Here too he follows Joyce. Such return to patterning, I might add, reverses the original impulse of the novel to free itself from myth by emphasizing the uniqueness of characters and events.

Pynchon sees the necessary fictions we construct as paranoid because, as McConnell explains it, "civilization, the drive to create a life that we choose to call human, is an innately psychotic misuse of the things of this world for our own self-deluded purposes." McConnell traces in Pynchon's three novels a "Conspiracy . . . a Plot whose

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ultimate goal appears to be the automatization" of life; a "Quest, an Investigation which attempts to bring the Plot to light"; and in between the characters who in struggling "to solve the secret of the Plot, . . . struggle also to regain what the Plot has stolen from them." *Abreaction,* McConnell tells us, is the technical term for the comedian's and paranoid's talent for taking upon themselves "the unpleasant aspects of chaos." In *Gravity's Rainbow,* Pynchon describes the war as "the Abreaction of the Lord of the Night." Pynchon takes upon himself the insanity of his time in order to win through, as McConnell wisely puts it, to an "earned sanity" that is "comic, reductive, a rationality just this side of bedlam." McConnell considers Pynchon's the most nightmarish of the novels treated here, but he overlooks the oddly saving contrast made by Pynchon's youthful exuberance, the college humor really, of the first two novels, *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49.*

The rapid success of demanding and innovative novelists like Barth and Pynchon, or of an obscure poet like Ashbery, shows that an audience brought up on the modernist classics has been taught to welcome innovation and difficulty. It is also a sign of the vitality of the romantic and modernist tradition that the spirit of innovation has been renewed once more, that we have seen since the sixties a revival of the radical or avant-garde style—this has shown most spectacularly in the way older writers like Lowell and Mailer have changed style—even if the avant-garde style is no longer at odds with the public but just what the public has been educated to long for. Modernism, as enfolded in romanticism, seems to be a movement whose end is nowhere in sight.

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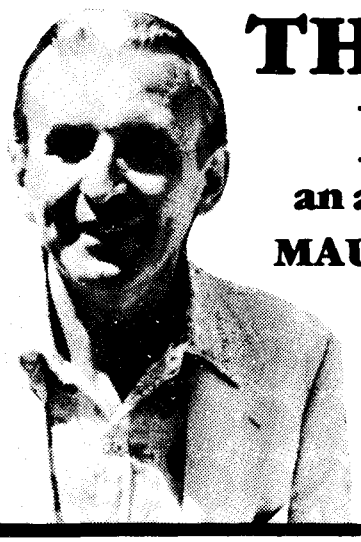

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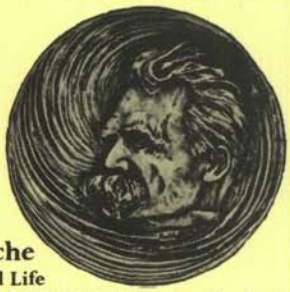

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